

MARCH OF TIMES*

Iqbal's Idea of the Mahdi, the End of History and the Settled Convictions

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

PERSPECTIVE:

Our discourse proceeds within a given perspective. So I would like to present, first of all, a few points about the conceptual framework of our perspective.

LEVELS OF REALITY

Let the traditional and the modern concepts of the universe or—if one prefers it, of reality—be placed side by side. According to typically modern thought, ‘reality’ is supposed to have originally consisted of the material world alone. It is said that life must have been ‘sparked off’, in some as yet unexplained way, from matter, and that living organisms developed psychic faculties, first of all the senses, then sentiment and memory and then, as man himself gradually evolved, imagination and reason. According to the traditional explanation, on the other hand, it is not the higher that proceeds from the lower but the lower from the higher; nor is existence limited to the psychic and the corporeal.⁷⁵ The Supreme Origin—and End—of all things is

⁷⁵ Lord Northbourne summarises the two approaches to the question, “What is Man?” in a simple and straightforward manner:

Are you in fact a being created by God in His own image, appointed by him as his representative on earth and accordingly given dominion over it, and equipped for the fulfilment of that function with a relative freedom of choice in thought and action which reflects the total absence of constraint attributable to God alone, but at the same time makes you liable to err? Are you essentially that, and only accidentally anything else?

Or, alternatively, are you essentially a specimen of the most advanced product so far known of a continuous and progressive evolution, starting from the more or less fortuitous stringing together of a protein molecule in some warm primeval mud, that mud itself being a rare and more or less fortuitous product of the evolution of the galaxies from a starting point about which the physicists have not yet quite made up their minds?

(Lord Northbourne, *Looking Back on Progress*, Lahore, Suhail Academy, 1983, 47.)

Absolute Truth which alone has Reality in the full sense and which manifests or creates, at lesser degrees of reality, the whole of existence. The traditional theory of existence, common to all religions, is summed up in the Islamic tradition: 'I was a Hidden Treasure, and I loved to be known and so I created the world.' The psychic and the corporeal soul and body are the two lowest levels of reality and together they constitute what we call 'this world'. Above them is the domain of the Spirit, known as 'the next world' from the standpoint of life on earth, but first in order of creation, for it is no less than the primal 'overflow' of the Divine Reality Itself. From that immediate reflection of the Hidden Treasure, the psychic domain is a projected image which in its turn projects the bodily domain.

THAT WHICH BINDS

The basic purpose of religion is to open up, for man, the way of return to his lost centrality. So long as he possessed spontaneously his bond with the Transcendent, the 'ligament' to which the term *religio* refers, it was not necessary for Heaven to reveal a religion in the ordinary sense. The first revealed religion was the response of Providence to the Fall of man and this Divine redress established on earth a Golden Age, named in Sanskrit *Krita-Yuga* because in it the rites necessary for regaining what was lost were 'accomplished'. Thus, by religion, the world of man became once more, albeit at a lower level than that of the Terrestrial Paradise, an image of Perfection.

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For the last two thousand years there has been no century that did not expect shortly 'the end of the world', whatever these words are thought to mean. Already in 40 BC Virgil wrote that the end of the Iron Age was near and that a new Golden Age was soon to begin; and Hinduism has long been awaiting "the rider on the white horse", *Kalkā*, the tenth Avatara of Vishnu, who is to close the present 'Dark Age' and inaugurate a new era of perfection. Maitreya, no less eagerly awaited by Buddhists, is clearly none other than the *Kalkā Avatara* and the same may be said of the Messiah. It is

true that in the monotheistic religions, all three of which expect the Messiah, the end of the present cycle is mainly identified with the end of time itself, that is, with the Doomsday.

Some six hundred years after the advent of Christianity, the Qur'an affirmed that 'the Hour', the promised end, was 'near', and that 'the heavens and the earth are pregnant with it'; and even in the early day of the caliphate it was sometimes said to a caliph: 'Mayst thou live long enough, sire, to give thy kingdom into the hands of Jesus, the son of Mary'. Nor would any early Muslim have believed that today, after 1400 year of Islam, the end would still not yet have come, although the Koran affirms that 'verily a day in the sight of they Lord is as a thousand years of what ye count'. Despite this reservation, and despite the Biblical equivalent for Jews and Christians, 'a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday', the expectations continued, century after century. They did not however remain at the same degree of intensity. In the Middle Ages, the acuteness of consciences engendered a collective sense of guilt which made it seem that the predicted signs of the second coming had already been fulfilled and that humanity had indeed reached its lowest ebb. According to Jewish, Christian and Islamic belief, the immediate threshold of the reign of the Messiah will be the tyranny of the Antichrist; and more than one prominent mediaeval figure was wrongly identified, in widespread opinion, with that greatest of malefactors. But it would no doubt be true to say, at any rate as regards the West, that the last three centuries before this were increasingly less expectant of the End. The gradual weakening of faith and the consequent lessening of attention paid to the Scriptures were aggravated by self-satisfaction at the so-called 'Renaissance' and, in the eighteenth century, at the so-called 'Enlightenment'. It is also in the nature of things that expectation, prolonged beyond a certain point, should begin to flag.

What then of the present century? Today belief in God and the Scriptures tends to be weaker than ever; and for Westerners it has largely been replaced by agnosticism, not to speak of the atheism which, in vast tracts of earthly

territory, is now systematically indoctrinated into children from an early age. Nor is the widespread belief in evolution and progress conducive to thinking along the same lines as our ancestors thought. We might therefore presume the Western world to be correspondingly less expectant of the end today than ever it was before. But is it? The answer is clearly no. There is, however, a marked difference between the present and the past in this respect. In the past it was concluded that the end must be near, but its imminence was not felt. Today the grounds for conviction have largely been set aside or forgotten; but the end is ‘in the air’, existentially sensed. It is as if the souls and bodies of men were woven of finality. This is undoubtedly one of the great signs of the times; and it coincides with other signs which are less dependent upon intuition and which, in a wide variety of ways, address themselves to reason, celestial signs relating to prophecies,⁷⁶ visions and auditions, and signs which may be called human, in an individual or a political sense.

THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC WORLD.

Let us now focus on the contemporary Islamic world with reference to the foregoing. But a word of caution in advance.

It is not given to man to foresee the future with any clarity—otherwise prophecies would be neither veiled nor ambiguous. But man has the right to speculate about the future in humble awareness of his limitations in that respect—otherwise prophecies would not be forthcoming at all. Moreover in some cases a settled conviction is legitimate and even, we may say, willed by Heaven, in virtue of the weight and universality of the predictions; and so it is with regard to an imminent world-wide devastation, not total, but none the

⁷⁶ Such as the famous twelfth-century prophecy of St. Malachy about the Popes, according to which the end is to come in the reign of the next Pope but one. For a study of prophecy, see Martin Lings, “St. Malachy’s Prophecy of the Popes” in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Summer-Autumn 1985, pp. 148-153e. This sign may be said to appeal to reason in that most of its predictions, that is, all those which are related to things now past, have already proved themselves to be true.

less of cataclysmic proportions and not final because it is to be 'before the end', though there are grounds for the conviction that 'the end' itself cannot be far off.

The survival of traditional Islam in the modern world, the intrusion of modernism into *ḍar al-Islām* and the recent resurgence of forces associated in either name or reality with Islam, added to the global significance of events which have occurred in the Middle East, central Asia, south Asia and elsewhere during the past few years all of these have helped to create, not a few, but a flood of works on Islam and its future, some of them being by the very people who but a few years ago rejected the very possibility of Islam being a force to be reckoned with in the future.

This veritable new industry, often based on either passing political currents or on conclusions hastily drawn from incomplete data, has already made many predictions for the Islamic world, ranging in style from melodrama to science fiction, with a few more balanced judgements thrown in between. Our aim here is certainly not to add one more scenario to the already existing ones.

THE BACK DROP

In the early 19th century, the Muslim intelligentsia realised that clearly something had gone wrong which was of the dimension of a cosmic crisis. How was it that non-Islamic forces were defeating the Islamic world everywhere and in such an irreversible fashion? Logically one of three attitudes could have been taken:

1. Something had gone wrong with the world, as God Himself had mentioned in His Book concerning the end of the world and the Blessed Prophet had described in his traditions. In such a case, the eclipse of Islam was itself a proof of the validity of the Islamic message which, however, also foretold the imminent appearance of the Mahdâ and the final eschatological events leading to the end of the world.

2. **MUSLIMS HAD CEASED TO FOLLOW ISLAM PROPERLY AND SHOULD RETURN TO THE PRACTICE OF THEIR RELIGION IN ITS PURE FORM AND**

WITH FULL VIGOUR SO AS TO DEFEAT THE NON-ISLAMIC FORCES AND ESCAPE THE PUNISHMENT THEY WERE RECEIVING FROM THE HANDS OF GOD FOR THEIR NEGLIGENCE OF THEIR RELIGION. SUCH A REACTION RESULTED IN THOSE REFORM MOVEMENTS THAT ARE TOO NUMEROUS TO BE DISCUSSED HERE. IT WAS ALSO CONNECTED WITH THE MUCH LESS STUDIED INNER REVIVALS WITHIN SUFI ORDERS OR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW ONES.

3. THE ISLAMIC MESSAGE HAD TO BE CHANGED, MODIFIED, ADAPTED OR REFORMED TO SUIT MODERN CONDITIONS AND TO BE ABLE SO TO ADAPT ITSELF TO THE MODERN WORLD AS TO BE ABLE TO OVERCOME WESTERN DOMINATION. OUT OF THIS ATTITUDE GREW ALL THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF MODERNISM INFLUENCED BY THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE RATIONALISM OF SUCH MEN AS DESCARTES AND VOLTAIRE, IN SOME QUARTERS, LOCKE AND HUME AND LATER SPENCER AND BERGSON, IN OTHERS. SO-CALLED ARAB LIBERALISM, AS WELL AS MODERNISTIC MOVEMENTS IN TURKEY, PERSIA AND THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT WERE ALSO THE RESULTS OF THIS THIRD POSSIBLE REACTION TO THE SUBJUGATION OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD BY THE WEST.

In some cases these, elements mixed with each other, Mahdâism, puritanical or 'fundamentalist' tendencies and modern reformist elements combining together in the thoughts and teachings of a single figure or school.

Leaving aside the reform movements and the modernist trends, we shall only consider the idea of Mahdâ and messianism in order to get to Iqbal's response to the idea.

“APPLIED EXPECTATIONS”—PAST AND FUTURE

The cataclysmic events of recent years have also brought back to life the movement of Mahdâism, which had been dormant for over a century since the wave caused by the first encounter between Islam and the modern world. The fact that much of the Islamic world is under the cultural and economic domination of non-Islamic forces, that the very attempt to free oneself from this domination through industrialisation and related processes brings with it

a greater destruction of Islamic values, that the world as a whole seems to be confronted with so many apparently insoluble problems such as, the ecological crisis and that forces of destruction have become such that all peoples are threatened with extinction at all times, have helped to bring back a sense of the imminent appearance of the Mahdâ: the one who will destroy inequity and re-establish the rule of God on earth. The view that the Blessed Prophet had promised that at the beginning of every century a renewer (*mujaddid*) would come to revive Islam from within has only strengthened this feeling of expectation for the Mahdâ. Already in the fall of 1979, the holiest site in Islam, namely the House of God in Makkah, was captured in the name of the Mahdâ, although the forces at work were far from being those of simply pious Muslims helping to bring about the parousia. During the Iranian Revolution also, many simple people believed that the coming of the Mahdâ was imminent. Without doubt, as the forces of destruction in the world increase, as the natural system strains ever more under the burden of a technology which is alien to the natural rhythms of the life of the cosmos and as movements which speak in the name of Islam itself fail to create the ideal Islamic order which they always promise, this sense of expectation of the Mahdâ and movements associated with it will increase among traditional and devout Muslims. This force is certainly a reality among present-day Muslims and is bound to continue as a powerful one in the future.

Hence, although the idea of the cyclic renewal of Islam through a 'renewer' (*mujaddid*) has always been alive, as has the wave of Mahdâism which sees in the Mahdâ the force sent by God to return Islam to its perfection, Islam has never faced within itself that type of secular utopianism which underlies so many of the socio-political aspects of modern thought. It is therefore essential to be aware of the profound distinction between modern utopianism and Islamic teachings concerning the *mujaddid*, or renewer of Islamic society, or even the Mahdâ himself. It is also basic to distinguish between the traditional figure of the *mujaddid* and the modern reformer, who usually, as a result of his feeble reaction to modern thought,

can hardly be said to have brought about the renewal of Islam. One must also be aware of the real nature of that revivalism, based on utopianism but using Islamic images that one finds in certain types of Islamic 'fundamentalism'.

There is every reason to expect such forms of messianism to continue into the future. As a billion people become ever more frustrated in failing to achieve the goals which they believe themselves to be legitimately entitled to realise, one reaction is certainly some kind of a politico-social eruption or upheaval. Another possible reaction, however, is a messianism, which promises victory with divine help but on the basis of the destruction of the existing order. Messianism cannot but possess a 'revolutionary' character. That is why traditional Muslims believe that only the Mahdâ himself, who will come before the end of history, will be able to carry out a veritable religious revolution signifying nothing less than the establishment of the Divine Order on earth, all other revolutions being forms of subversion and further destruction of what remains of the religious tradition. To the extent that the world becomes a more dangerous place in which to live and especially while the Muslim peoples see themselves as confronted by alien forces on all sides which threaten their very existence, the wave of messianism is bound to increase in accordance, in fact, with some of the sayings of the Prophet of Islam about the signs of the latter days even if the status of these traditions remains disputed among the scholars of *Àadâth*.

This brings us to an aspect of the question that warrants a digression. Its importance can not be gainsaid in these discussions since a lot of exercises that ended in futility could have been avoided with its help. After this, we can turn to Iqbal's treatment of the idea of the Mahdâ and other signs of the Eleventh Hour.

The most important record that we find in the Hadith Literature is the last part of the “*Hadith of Gabriel*”⁷⁷ which speaks about the signs of the end of

⁷⁷ The Hadith of Gabriel is found in many of the canonical collections of Hadith literature with some variations. Here we have followed the text as given by Muslim in his *SaÁÁÁ*. See Muslim, *Ÿm«n*; Bukh«râ, *Ÿm«n*. The text reads as follows:

“ ‘Umar ibn al-KhaÇÇ«b said: One day when we were with God’s messenger, a man with very white clothing and very black hair came up to us. No mark of travel was visible on him, and none of us recognised him. Sitting down before the Prophet, leaning his knees against his, and placing his hands on his thighs, he said, ‘Tell me, Muhammad, about submission.’”

He replied, “Submission means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God’s messenger, that you should perform the ritual prayer, pay the alms tax, fast during Ramaï«n, and make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to go there.”

The man said, “You have spoken the truth.” We were surprised at his questioning him and then declaring that he had spoken the truth. He said, ‘Now tell me about faith.’”

He replied, “Faith means that you have faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and that you have faith in the measuring out, both its good and its evil.”

Remarking that he had spoken the truth, he then said, ‘Now tell me about doing what is beautiful.’

He replied, “Doing what is beautiful means that you should worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you.

Then the man said, “Tell me about the Hour.”

The Prophet replied, “About that he who is questioned knows no more than the questioner.”

The man said, “Then tell me about its marks.”

He said, “The slave girl will give birth to her mistress, and you will see the barefoot, the naked, the destitute, and the shepherds vying with each other in building.”

Then the man went away. After I had waited for a long time, the Prophet said to me, “Do you know who the questioner was, ‘Umar?’” I replied, ‘God and His messenger know best.’ He said, “He was Gabriel. He came to teach you your religion.”

time or the *Eleventh Hour* in an elliptical manner.⁷⁸ The relevant part reads as follows:

The man said, 'Then tell me about its marks.'

He said, "The slave girl will give birth to her mistress, and you will see the barefoot, the naked, the destitute, and the shepherds vying with each other in building."

Various explanations have been offered to solve the enigmatic references found in the text. The Prophet mentions two marks that would tell people that the end of time is near. The first is that "the slave girl will give birth to her mistress." Like many sayings referring to the last times, this sounds like a riddle, but it is not too difficult to understand.

The basic meaning is that the social order will be disrupted. In normal times, there are acknowledged social relationships that preserve order. The Koran provides indications of these relationships through the great attention it pays to the necessity of honouring and obeying one's parents. Another normal relationship is that between rulers and the ruled: Certain people give instructions, and others obey. "Obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you" (Qur'ān 4:59). The following Ādāth could also be cited in this regard:

⁷⁸ The marks of the Hour were a topic of major interest for the Prophet and his companions. The books on Ādāth devote a good deal of space to the many sayings of the Prophet relevant to the signs that will presage the end of time. The Qur'ān frequently talks about the terror of the Hour, and in a few instances it mentions events that are taken as its precursors. For example, a beast will appear shortly before the final destruction: "When the Word falls on them, We shall bring forth for them out of the earth a beast that shall say to them that people had no faith in Our signs" (27:82). Another verse warns that the barbarian tribes Gog and Magog will be unleashed to do their work:

"When Gog and Magog are unloosed, and they slide down out of every slope, and the true promise draws near-then the eyes of the truth-concealers will stare: 'Woe to us, we were heedless of this! No, we were wrongdoers.' "(21:96-97).

“Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you will be held responsible for your sheep. . . .”

The proper relationship of mistress to servant girl is for the mistress to issue commands and the servant girl to obey (there may of course be other relationships as well, but this specific relationship is at issue here). One of the places where this relationship holds is mother and daughter. The mother raises and nurtures the daughter, and the daughter in turn obeys the mother. However, if the “servant girl gives birth to her mistress,” then mother has become servant and daughter has become mistress: This is a reversal of the right social order; it is a profound disequilibrium, and its seriousness in the Islamic consciousness can perhaps best be judged by the fact that in several verses the Koran makes reverence to one’s parents the first practical application of *tawÁád*, as we have already noted. If the mother-daughter relationship is upset, and if that is one of the most fundamental relationships of society, then surely the relationship of *tawÁád*, not to mention other relationships, will also be upset: Religion and society would fall apart.⁷⁹

There is a point of distinction here. The *Hadith of Gabriel* is regarded authentic and accepted by all the Àadâth Scholars (*MuÁaddithân*). But this is not the case with all the materials in Àadâth collections that are referred in connection with the issue of the end of times and the signs of the Eleventh Hour. There is a strong possibility of alternative perspectives on these materials not by having recourse to one of our fashionable philosophies but to the strict canons of the science of Àadâth and its criticism. I am not an authority on the subject but I would venture to offer my humble comments gathered from my readings on the subject.

The materials that me find in the Àadâth collections could be classified under four headings:

⁷⁹ Another interpretation, focusing on a less general explanation, says “the slave girl will give birth to her mistress” refers to the abolition of slavery in the twentieth century while “the destitute, and the shepherds vying with each other in building” is a reference to the aftermath of the oil money in the Middle East.

Advent of Mahdâ
The Antichrist (*Dajjæl*)

Second Coming of Christ (*Nuẓÿl-i-MasâÁ*)

Events of the Eleventh Hour

The *Events of the Eleventh Hour* form an important segment of the Àadâth materials that concerns the issue of the Hour or the “ signs of the Hour”. In the terminology of the Àadâth it is termed *Mak«Áim*. We propose to use it as a test case to demonstrate the shift of paradigms in the history of interpretation of ideas. We shall return to the issue of the *Advent of Mahdâ* against the backdrop of the insight gained from the present discussion.

Let us have a look at the classical position that the *salaf*⁸⁰ took regarding to the issue of the *Mak«Áim*.

The traditions that speak of the *Mak«Áim* are couched in a manner of expression that indicate imminent destruction of the world. *L« taqÿm al-s«‘ab ill«*, or “the world would not end until ...” or “You should wait for... after me”....

The debate that resulted from these expressions centred on the questions: Do they report of the nearness of the “Hour”? Or do they point toward another version of the unfolding of the events after the times of the Prophet?

Classical position of the *salaf* is that all such expressions are a device of emphasis (*ta’kâd*) and corroboration. The Prophet foretold of the events that his Companions had to encounter after his lifetime.⁸¹ The *salaf* did not read into these texts anything that pertained to the “end of time” or the events

⁸⁰ The word *salaf* (early generations) is used in a precise meaning in our discourse. It refers to the end of the period of the Followers and the Followers of the Followers (*T«bi‘ÿn* and *tab‘a T«bi‘ân*) that roughly coincides with the end of the Umayyid rule in the Arabian Peninsula. This also corresponds with the *Áadâth* of the *Khayr al-qurÿn*.

⁸¹ S. ‘Uthm«n and the social upheaval/ dispute between S. ‘Alâ and S. Mu‘«wiyah etc.

that preceded the “Hour”. They did not find the materials relevant to these questions and took it as an example of the common literary device of the Arabic language that indicated the inevitability of the events and not a prophecy about the chronological unfolding of the future.

If we collect all these reports on the *Mak«Āim*, the result that a historical analysis clearly yields is that all these reports spoke of the events that the Companions had to encounter after the death of the Prophet. The *salaf* were clear about the referents of these reports and in their view these texts did not inform the community of the signs of the Hour.

Then we see the first political rift within the community i.e. the political struggle between Banë Umayyah and Banë ‘Abb«s. Since the opinion of the *salaf* was not codified and was not promulgated in the form of systematic consensus, some of the proponents of the struggle took advantage of these materials and used it to defend their strife and wars of political power.⁸² Not only this but the additions of certain symbols to the texts was also witnessed in that era; symbols that were specific to one of the factions. Alongside with it, new interpretations started emerging that focused on some of the elliptical references that gave themselves to a multiplicity of interpretations.⁸³ If one studies this period that spans from the 2nd to the 5th century and looks at the trends at work and tries to gain an understanding of the prevalent interpretations, it seems that all the events foretold under the *Mak«Āim* were being identified with the events that took place in their own times.

By this time we had two interpretations, that of the *salaf* and the other of the *kehalaf* that had come to the fore after that period. Then, as we enter into the period that is called the time of the *mutawassiĈân*, the views diverged. Some of the authorities, following the interpretation of the *salaf*, applied these reports to the time of the Companions while the others, who

⁸² The campaign of Abë Muslim Khur««nâ and the other warring factions that are well known facts of history.

⁸³ Ibn Kaldën has described it in detail.

represented the general trend, saw in these texts the “signs of the Hour”. The shift took the scene to the other end and the same texts were subsequently read in a different perspective.

There is another very instructive example of a similar shift of paradigm with an equally interesting history of interpretation in the tradition which tells us that the *khilafah* shall last for a period of time, then *mulëkan* ‘*ûan* shall intrude for a period of time, then *mulkan jabariyyah* for a period of time, and then, after that, the *kilafah* shall be witnessed once more. As for the times after that, the Prophet is reported to have kept his counsel. Since the tradition is important in the sense that its modern interpretations have provided the intellectual underpinnings to many a contemporary reform/political movement, it would be useful to have a look at the text.⁸⁴

Takëna al-nubuwwatu fâkum m« sh«’ Allahu an takëna thumma yarfa‘uh« idh« sh«’a an yarfa‘ah« thumma takënu khil«fatan ‘al« minh«j al-nubuwwah fa takënu m« sh«’ Allahu an takëna thumma yarfa‘uh« idh« sh«’ Allahu an yarfa‘ah« thumma takënu mulkan ‘*ûan* fa yakënu m« sh«’ Allahu an yakëna thumma yarfa‘uh« idh« sh«’a an yarfa‘ah« thumma takënu mulkan jabriyyatan fa takënu m« sh«’ Allahu an takëna thumma yarfa‘uh« idh« sh«’a an yarfa‘ah« thumma takënu khil«fatan ‘al« minh«j al-nubuwwah. Thumma sakata.

⁸⁴ AÁamad ibn À«nbal, *Musnad*, 17680.

(The Prophet ﷺ said, “Prophethood would last in your midst as long as God willed it to remain, then He will take it away whenever He willed it to come to an end. Then there would be *keḥikḥfab* following in the footsteps of Prophethood. It would last as long as God willed it to remain, then He will put an end to it whenever He willed it to come to an end. Then there would be a biting, mordacious kingship.⁸⁵ It would continue as long as God willed it to remain, then He will put an end to it whenever He willed it to come to an end. Then there would come the reign of coercive kingship.⁸⁶ It would last as long as God willed it to remain, then He will put an end to it whenever He willed it to come to an end. Then there would be *keḥikḥfab* following in the footsteps of Prophethood. Thereafter he remained silent.)

When S. ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Azâz became the *kalâḥfab*, ‘Ābâb ibn S◄lim, the narrator of this *‘Ādâth*, wrote a letter to him. After having congratulated him in the letter, ‘Ābâb said that his rule was foretold by the report and it had come true.

(‘Ābâb said, “when ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Azâz became the *kalâḥfab*, Yazâd bin Nu‘m◄n bin Bashâr was among his companions so I wrote to him reminding him of this *‘Ādâth*. I told him that in my opinion the Leader of the Faithful (*amâr al-mu‘minân*) i.e. ‘Umar (bin ‘Abd al-‘Azâz) was the one who came after the biting, mordacious kingship and the coercive kingship. My letter was presented to ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Azâz who was delighted to read it and was please with it.)⁸⁷

The opinion reflected in the words of the narrator of the report is not an isolated and remote view. It is shared by all the *salaf* who understood the *‘Ādâth* in the sense that it referred to the times of the rightly guided caliphs in the first place, then to the tyrannical rules of the early Umayyads and after that to the despotic governments of the later Umayyads that were once again

⁸⁵ That is to say a rule of tyrannical or oppressive governments.

⁸⁶ That is to say a government that comes to power through force and coercion.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

turned into the rightly guided caliphate at the hands of S. ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Azâz.

Against the background of this interpretation of the *salaf* when we look at the interpretation of the same text given to it by our contemporaries in our near past,⁸⁸ that is in the past hundred years or so, we find that the same tradition is being used and commented upon by all the leading journalists/scholars, with the exclusion of the last part which leaves no doubts as to what it meant by the restoration of the *kbikfab*. In the last one and a half century one hardly finds a reference in the Indian sub-Continent as well as in the Arab world, to the last and decisive part of the text.⁸⁹ Now the dominant interpretation that is given to the words of the *‘Adâth* report refers to a different classification of the historical epochs. According to this scheme the first phase of the rightly guided caliphate comes to an end with the death of S. ‘Alâ ibn abâ ñlib. The period extending from the rule of the Umayyads down to the invasion of the colonial powers of the Muslim lands is identified with *mulkan ‘âlan* (tyrannical or oppressive monarchies) and whole of the colonial era corresponds to *mulkan jabriyyatan* (coercive kingships). The independent nation states that emerged all over the Muslim lands in the wake of the end of the colonial era are naturally relegated to the status of replicas, extensions or dwindling outposts of the colonial rule while the second phase of *kbikfab ‘al minbaj al-nubuwwah* (*kbikfab* following in the footsteps of Prophethood) is situated in the future that the providence has in store for the *ummah* and which still has to unfold.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ See Amân A‘asan I‘l‘â, “Sunnat i Khulafâ i R‘shidân”, in *Tajhâm i Dân*, Lahore, 2001, pp. 82.

⁸⁹ Mawlân Mawdêdâ, Rashâd Ri‘ and the others are no exception.

⁹⁰ This mode of argument is well represented in the writings of Dr. Asr‘ A‘amad and his school of thought. See Khurshâd ‘jlam, *Ummat i Muslimah kâ ‘Umar*, Qur‘n Academy, Lahore; Asr‘ A‘amad, “Mahi i Maw‘ed kâ Shak‘iyyat”, in *Mâthaq*, Lahore, Nov. 1996, pp. 7-40. The implications of this kind of interpretation are serious and far-reaching but nevertheless clear. If the second phase of *kbikfab ‘al minbaj al-nubuwwah* is an eventuality that still has to manifest then every man of faith has a religious *duty* to strive for it. The *duty*,

There are obvious flaws in this line of argument. According to this perspective all the Muslim governments from the Umayyad dynasty down to the Mughal, Ottoman and the Safavid dynasties are relegated to the status of either *mulkan ʿāṣiān* (tyrannical or oppressive monarchies) or made to correspond to *mulkan jabriyyatan* (coercive kingships). Secondly there is evidently no place for the reign of S. ʿUmar bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzâz in this scheme whereas it is considered to be *khilafah ʿalā minhaj al-nubuwwah* by every definition of the term. Thirdly all the political systems evolved, adopted and used by the Muslims throughout history become nothing but deviations, if not downright monstrosities and the entire Islamic history is turned into an anomaly that ran contrary to the divine plan! The independent nation states of the post-colonial era do not fit in either.

This leads us to understand that there is a recurrent process of interpretation that is at work in all the reports of this sort. On the one hand there is a classical interpretation of the *salaf*. It undergoes a change at the hands of the *kehalaf*. Then it receives a new interpretation by the latter day scholars that may be entirely different or even contrary to the interpretation of the earlier generations.

Another important question that has to be considered here is the interpretative relation of these reports to the Qurʿānic text. If such reports are analysed on the basis of the Qurʿānic text or its textual links they yield different results as compared to the significance these same reports acquire when they are considered in isolation. This is something which we can not discuss here. However, this is an important consideration that should never be lost sight of while interpreting the reports that are of a cryptic nature. We will, however, have the occasion to invoke this methodology in the analysis of the reports about the Mahdâ that we intend to consider in the following section.

translated into practical terms, could range from political struggle to militant activism according to the perspective of the group in question.

THE EXPECTED PERSONALITY (MAHDI)

Let us now turn to consider the investigations made about the reports that pertain to the question of the coming of the Mahdâ.

No leading authority in the science of Àadâth has ever accepted the reports that speak of the Mahdâ and the events around his personality as authentic. That is well known. We may add to it the general rule which says that issues of a universal import or issues that pertain to the essentials of religion and its doctrinal foundations, if these are not found in Im«m M«dik's *MuwaÇÇ«*, are liable to be suspect from the technical point of view of Àadâth criticism. This is a general rule of the Àadâth Scholars (*muÀaddithân*).

With this background it has to be noted that there is no mention of these reports in *MuwaÇÇ«*, not even in *Bukh«râ* and *Muslim*.⁹¹ These are only found in the *Sunan*. The Àadâth Scholars who are strict in their application of the canons of Àadâth criticism refuse to accept these as authentic even if these are found in the *Sunan* on account of the weakness in their chain of narration. Other scholars who take a lenient view, at the most, regard these reports as *Àasan*. Great authorities of the science of *Àadâth*, however, did not accept these as authentic.

One has to face an important question here: Would it be justified, in any valid sense, to base a movement of reform or a mode of action on such an unreliable religious and epestemic foundations? The question becomes further complicated and gains sinister dimensions when we relate it to the plethora of trends and movements that we find in the contemporary world which are informed, not by the incontrovertible religious data, but rather seem to be grounded in a "settled conviction".

⁹¹ Iqbal intended to make the same point, perhaps, when he drew the attention of his interlocutor from the Q«di«nâ journal *The Light* to the same fact and invited him to think about its implications. He said "It is not mentioned in *Bukh«râ* and *Muslim*, the two books, which are believed to be most reliable." See *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, IAP, Lahore, 1995, pp.203-4.

The “Settled Conviction”

Mention should also be made of a “settled conviction” on these questions that is commonly found among the Muslims.⁹² The “settled conviction” could be summarised as follows:

THE KORAN STATES SPECIFICALLY THAT BEFORE THE END EVERY TOWN SHALL BE EITHER TOTALLY DESTROYED OR SEVERELY PUNISHED; AND IT MAY BE ASSUMED THAT THIS WILL HAVE BEEN PRECEDED BY A FRENZY OF URBANISM, FOR WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE SIGNS THAT WOULD HERALD THE APPROACH OF THE LATTER DAYS, THE PROPHET MADE MENTION IN PARTICULAR OF THE EXCESSIVE HEIGHT OF THE BUILDINGS THAT MEN WOULD BUILD.

In Islam the restorer is mentioned in many sayings of the Prophet. Without being named, he is referred to as ‘the rightly guided one’, al-Mahdâ; and it may be presumed, in view of the vast scope of his authority, that the coming of the Mahdâ will mark the fulfilment of the Jewish and Christian Eliatic hopes. The Islamic traditions point to a world-wide function which, although situated in Islam, is of too universal a nature not to extend beyond its boundaries, at least by radiation if not by deliberate and mandated action. Nor can it be excluded that redresses, which are now impossible the world over, might become, under his aegis, once more possible outside Islam as well as within it, after a ‘Purification Day’ had removed the obstacles.

The hopeful expectation of the Mahdâ has produced in Islam a number of false Mahdâs throughout the centuries. Of the true Mahdâ the Prophet is reported to have said: ‘He will be broad of forehead and aquiline of nose. He will fill the earth with right and with justice even as it hath been filled with wrong and oppression. Seven years will he reign. But towards the end of his reign or after it, Islam expects also the Antichrist. The Prophet is said to have mentioned that many had already foretold the coming of this greatest of evils, but that he himself was the first to make known a

⁹² For a comparative study of these ideas in the three monotheistic traditions see Victor Danner, “The Last Days in Judaism, Christianity and Islam”, in Arvind Sharma, (ed.) *Fragments of Infinity, Essays in Religion and Philosophy*, pp. 63-86. Also see S. H. Nasr, et al, “Messianism and the Mahdi”, in *Expectation of the Millennium, Shi’ism in History*, State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 7-43.

clear bodily sign by which he might be recognised. He would be 'a man blind in his right eye, in which all light is extinguished, even as it were a grape'. As in Christianity, it is believed in Islam that he will cause corruption and that by his power to work marvels he will win many to his side. But he will none the less be resisted. The Prophet said: 'A body of my people will not cease to fight for the truth until the coming forth of the Antichrist'; and he meant this inclusively, as is shown by what he says of the resistance to the Antichrist; 'When they are pressing on to fight, even while they straighten their lines for the prayer when it is called, Jesus the son of Mary will descend and will lead them in prayer. And the enemy of God, when he seeth Jesus, will melt even as salt melteth in water. If he were let be, he would melt into perishing; but God will slay him at the hand of Jesus, who will show them his blood upon his lance.'

The explanation of the almost simultaneous presence of the Mahdâ and the Antichrist will already be clear. The two opposite tendencies which, as we have seen, inevitably characterise the end of the cycle, reach their extreme of opposition in these two beings. It is the Mahdâ who incarnates 'the spirit of the times'; but the macrocosm has to die and the Antichrist is its final and fatal sickness. As to those who personify its terminal wisdom, above all the Mahdâ and with him, the elect, they may thereby also be considered as the providential receptacles for the light which shines into the end of this cycle from the outset of the next. It is thus that although the Antichrist is said to come after the Mahdâ or towards the end of his reign, spreading corruption and partly undoing his work, the Mahdâ is none the less he who will have the last word, in as much as his kingdom is the harbinger of the new age, wherein it will have its prolongation, after having displayed in itself its own perfection of maturity and fulfilment.

The question of the *Àadâth* materials about the Second Coming of Christ and the antichrist (*Dajjâl*) has a long history and on going debates that reverberate through the ages. I have neither the audacity nor the time to enter into it or offer any comments except that in this case, as in others, a safe course is to pay more heed to the views of the early day scholars.

IQBAL AND THE IDEA OF THE MAHDI

Against this backdrop we can now proceed to see what Iqbal had to say about the idea of the Mahdâ.

As early as 1916 we find him expressing his views about the traditions of Mahdâ and the Second Coming of Christ. In August 1916 he wrote to 'al-Dân Baranâ:

*Ibn Khaldën has made a detailed critique of the traditions pertaining to the issues of Mahdâ and the (Second Coming of) Christ. In his view, all these traditions are weak. As far as the principles of Aadâth criticism are concerned, I am in agreement with him. However, I am of the view that a great personality shall emerge among the Muslims. My conviction is not founded upon these traditions. It has a different basis.*⁹³

Quatrains of *B«l i Jibrâl*, published in 1924, include a verse which reads:⁹⁴

خَطَّةٌ قُسْطُنْطِيَّةٌ يَعْنِي قَيْصَرَ كَادِيَارِ

مہدی اُمت کی سَطوت کا نشانِ پاندار

مہدی سے مراد کوئی خاص مہدی نہیں ہے، وہی جو عالم افکار میں زلزلہ پیدا کر سکے۔ ایک اور جگہ مہدی: بر

حق ہے۔ اس کی تشریح آپ ملیں گے تو کردوں گا۔

⁹³ *Answer-i-Iqbal*, IAP, Lahore, 1977, p. 144. These views are corroborated in the records of his table talk that were preserved by various people. See the following quotations: Mahmëd Nü«mâ, *Malfë«t*, Lahore, n.d., pp. 110-111. Also see *Malfë«t i Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1977, p. 142.

Akhtar R«hâ, "Asad Mult«nâ kü Râzn«mchü kü Chand Awr«q", *Iqbal*, Vol. 23, No. 2, April 1976, p. 83.

⁹⁴ See *Kulliy«t i Iqbal*, IAP, Lahore, 1994, pp. 415.

آپ کو کسی عالم سے یہ سوالات کرنے چاہئیں جو آپ نے مجھ سے کئے ہیں۔ میں ز، یادہ سے ز، یادہ آپ کو صرف اپنا عقیدہ بتا سکتا ہوں اور بس۔ میرے نزدیک مہدی، مسیحیت اور مجددیت کے متعلق جو احادیث ہیں وہ ایرانی اور عجمی تحنیلات کا نتیجہ ہیں۔ عربی تحنیلات اور قرآن کی صحیح سپرٹ سے ان کو کوئی سروکار نہیں۔ ہاں یہ ضرور ہے کہ مسلمانوں نے بعض علماء یا دیگر قائدین امت کو مجدد یا مہدی کے الفاظ سے یاد کیا ہے۔ مثلاً محمد ثانی فاتح قسطنطنیہ کو مؤرخین نے مہدی لکھا ہے۔ بعض علماء امت کو امام اور مجدد کے الفاظ سے یاد کیا ہے۔ اس میں کوئی اعتراض کی بات نہیں۔ زمانہ حال میں میرے نزدیک اگر کوئی شخص مجدد کہلانے کا مستحق ہے تو وہ صرف جمال الدین افغانی ہے۔ مصر و ایران و ترکی و ہند کے مسلمانوں کی، تاریخ > ب کوئی لکھے گا تو اسے سب سے پہلے عبدالوہاب نجدی اور بعد میں جمال الدین افغانی کا ذکر کرنا ہوگا۔ مؤرخ الذکر ہی اصل ہیں موصس ہے۔ زمانہ حال کے مسلمانوں کی نشاۃ ثانیہ کا۔ اگر قوم نے ان کو عام طور پر مجدد نہیں کہا یا انہوں نے خود اس کا دعویٰ نہیں کیا تو اس سے ان کے کام کی اہمیت میں کوئی فرق اہل بصیرت کے نزدیک نہیں آتا۔

عالم اسلام:

عالم اسلام کے متعلق فرمایا کہ پچھلی چند صدیوں میں اسلام کا زمانہ انحطاط رہا، اس لیے اعلیٰ شخصیتیں بہت وقفے کے بعد پیدا ہوئیں۔ مثلاً امام غزالی، مولانا روم اور شاہ ولی اللہ جیسی ہستیاں۔ مگر کچھ عرصے سے رنگ بدلا ہوا نظر آتا ہے اور اعلیٰ ہستیاں پے پے پیدا ہوئی ہیں۔ مثلاً سرسید احمد خان، جمال الدین افغانی، قاضی اعظم جان، مفتی محمد عبدہ، سعد زاعول پاشا اور موجودہ زمانے میں امان اللہ خان، رضا شاہ، مصطفیٰ کمال اور ابن سعود وغیرہ۔ یہ سب اس امر کی علامت ہیں کہ اسلام میں دوبارہ ترقی کے آثار پیدا ہو رہے ہیں اور ممکن ہے بہت جلد کوئی غیر معمولی انسان انقلاب کا باعث ہو۔

مرد منتظر:

یہاں پہنچ کر میں نے سوال کیا کہ آپ کے اس خیال کے متعلق طرح طرح کے شکوک و طماہر کیے جاتے ہیں کہ آپ اعلیٰ انسان (Superman) کے منتظر ہیں، جیسا کہ آپ نے ”اسرار و رموز“ میں بھی فرمایا ہے: ع

اے سوار اشہب دوران بیا

اس سے کیسی شخصیت مراد ہے؟ کیا آپ پیغمبر صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم کے بعد کسی اور انسان کامل کی توقع بھی رکھتے ہیں؟ بولے ”ہر گز نہیں۔ میں دوسروں، بالخصوص اہل شیعہ کی طرح کسی خاص انسان کے انتظار میں نہیں اور نہ آنحضرت صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم کے بعد کسی انسان کامل کی توقع ہو سکتی ہے۔ میں نے جس کی تمنا ظاہر کی ہے وہ یہی اعلیٰ قسم کی ہستیاں ہیں جو آکر سو سائٹی کو بلند کر دیتی ہیں۔ ضروری نہیں کہ ایک ہی ہستی ہو بلکہ ممکن ہے کہ ایک قوم کی قوم ہو۔“ میں نے کہا ”آپ کے مصرع مذکور سے تو ایک ہی انسان کا خیال پیدا ہوتا ہے۔“ بولے ”نہیں، آپ ہی بتائیے کہ ایک ایسی قوم کی توقع ظاہر کرتے ہوئے میں شاعرانہ زبان میں ان الفاظ کے علاوہ اور کیا الفاظ استعمال کر سکتا تھا؟“

ڈاکٹر صاحب نے فرمایا: اکثر لوگ مہدی کے منتظر ہیں مگر وہ آنے میں نہیں آتا۔ ایک اور بزرگ لاہور میں ہوا کرتے تھے جب کبھی ملتے مہدی کے آنے کی تاریخ بتا جاتے۔ وہ تاریخ گزر جاتی تو ایک نئی تاریخ مقرر کر دیتے۔ اسی انتظار میں ان کا انتقال ہو گیا۔ مگر مہدی کونہ آنا تھا نہ آیا۔ کچھ دن ہوئے ایک اور بزرگ تشریف لائے وہ بھی مہدی کے آنے کی خوشخبری دے گئے۔ میں نے ان سے کہا کہ مجھے پہلے بھی کئی لوگ مہدی کی آمد کی خبر دے گئے ہیں۔ مگر ابھی تک وہ نہیں آیا۔ میرا خیال ہے کہ ہمیں اپنے کام مہدی کے لیے نہیں اٹھار کھنے چاہئیں۔

مہدی کے قصے کے بعد قدرتی طور پر مسیح کا ذکر آ گیا۔ میں نے کہا احمدیوں کے بارے میں جو آپ نے رسالہ شائع کیا ہے اس میں آپ نے لکھا ہے کہ Spengler شیمپلر نے مسلمانوں کو مجوسی اقوام میں شامل کرنے میں غلطی کی ہے Spengler نے مجوسی اقوام کی ایک خصوصیت یہ بیان کی ہے کہ وہ کسی آنے والے نبی کی منتظر رہتی

ہیں۔ مسلمان کسی آنے والے نبی کے منتظر نہیں۔ میں نے کہا آپ کا یہ دعویٰ کہ مسلمان کسی آنے والے نبی کے منتظر نہیں درست نہیں کیونکہ مسلمان عام طور پر مسیح کی آمد ثانی کے منتظر ہیں۔ ڈاکٹر صاحب نے فرمایا میں اس کا قائل نہیں۔ میں نے اپنے اشعار میں اس عقیدہ کا اظہار بھی کیا ہے اسی بنا پر احمدیوں نے مسلمانوں کو میرے خلاف ابھارنے کی کوشش کی مگر وہاں کچھ اثر نہ ہوا۔

اے طفل خود معاملہ قد سے عصا بلند

کھلے جاتے ہیں اسرارِ نہانی

گیادورِ حدیث 'لن ترانی'

ہوئی جس کی خودی پہلے نمودار

وہی مہدی، وہی آخر زمانی!

مہدی

قوموں کی حیات ان کے تخیل پہ ہے موقوف

یہ ذوق سکھاتا ہے ادب مُرغِ چمن کو

مجزوبِ فرنگی نے بہ اندازِ فرنگی

مہدی کے تخیل سے کیا زندہ وطن کو

اے وہ کہ تو مہدی کے تخیل سے ہے بیزار

نومید نہ کرا ہوئے مشکیں سے خُتن کو
ہو زندہ کفن پوش تو میت اُسے سمجھیں
یا چاک کریں مردکِ ناداں کے کفن کو؟
مہدی برحق

سب اپنے بنائے ہوئے زنداں ہیں میں مجبوس
خاور کے ثوابت ہوں کہ افرنگ کے ستار
پیرانِ کلیسا ہوں کہ شیخانِ حرم ہوں
نے جدتِ گفتار ہے، نے جدتِ کردار
ہیں اہل سیاست کے وہی کُنہ خم و پیچ
شاعر اسی افلاسِ تخیل میں گرفتار
دنیا کو ہے اُس مہدی برحق کی ضرورت
ہو جس کی نگہ زلزلہ عالم افکار

At the end of the 5th Lecture of his *Reconstruction*, (written vic. 1927) he remarked:⁹⁵

⁹⁵ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, IAP, Lahore, 1989, p. 115. The editor of the *Reconstruction* adds: "Cf. *Muqaddimah*, Chapter III, section 51: 'The Fatimid.....', trans.

IT MAY FURTHER BE REGARDED AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CURE FOR THE MAGIAN ATTITUDE OF CONSTANT EXPECTATION WHICH TENDS TO GIVE A FALSE VIEW OF HISTORY. IBN KHALDĒN, SEEING THE SPIRIT OF HIS OWN VIEW OF HISTORY, HAS FULLY CRITICISED AND I BELIEVE, FINALLY DEMOLISHED THE ALLEGED REVELATIONAL BASIS IN ISLAM OF AN IDEA SIMILAR, AT LEAST IN ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS, TO THE ORIGINAL MAGIAN IDEA WHICH HAD REAPPEARED IN ISLAM UNDER THE PRESSURE OF MAGIAN THOUGHT.

REFERENCE MAY ALSO BE MADE TO ALLAMA IQBAL'S LETTER DATED 7TH APRIL 1932 TO MUÁAMMAD AÁSAN WHEREIN, AMONG OTHER THINGS, HE STATES:⁹⁶

Instead of sending your queries to me you should have addressed these questions to a scholar of Islam. At the most that I can do for you is to tell you about my belief in this regard. In my view all the traditions (aÁ«dâth) that speak of the Mahdâ, messianism and the concept of a renovator (mujaddid) are a result of the Iranian and 'ajamâ imagination. They have nothing to do with the Arab ethos and the true spirit of the Qur'«n. Nevertheless, some of the ulam«' or other leaders of the ummah have been remembered by the title of mujaddid or Mahdâ.⁹⁷

In 1935 his article "Islam and Q«di«nism" appeared in *The Statesman*, Calcutta. While pointing out the parallels of "pre-Islamic Magianism" that

Rosenthal, II, 156-200. Ibn KhaldĒn recounts formally twenty-four traditions bearing upon the belief in Mahdâ (none of which is from *Bukh«ri* or *Muslim*) and questions the authenticity of them all. Cf. Also the article 'al-Mahdâ' in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* and P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 439-49, for the religio-political background of the Im«m-Mahdâ idea....

And finally it shall be rewarding to read this last paragraph in conjunction with Allama's important notes on the back cover of his own copy of Spengler's *Decline of the West*, facsimile of which is reproduced in *Descriptive Catalogue of Allama Iqbal's Personal Library*. Plate No.33." (pp. 188)

⁹⁶ *Iqbal Nama*, Sh. M. Ashraf, Lahore, 1951, Vol. II, p. 231-32.

⁹⁷ For his own use of it in this sense see "Bil«d i Isl«miyyah" (1908 and after..) *B«ng i Dar«*, in *Kulliyat i Iqbal*, IAP, Lahore, 1994, pp. 172.

existed between Q«dism and Bahism he commented on the allied issue of Mahdâ as well. It reads:⁹⁸

Heretical movements in Muslim Persia under the pressure of pre-Islamic Magian ideas invented the words “burëx” “Áulël”, “Éill” to cover this idea of perpetual reincarnation. It was necessary to invent new expressions for a Magian idea in order to make it less shocking to Muslim conscience. Even the phrase “promised Messiah” is not a product of Muslim religious consciousness. It is a bastard expression and has its origin in the pre-Islamic Magian outlook. We don’t find it in early Islamic religions and historical literature. This remarkable fact is revealed by Prof. Wensinck’s Concordance of the Traditions of the Holy Prophet, which covers no less than 11 collections of the traditions and three of the earliest historical documents of Islam. One can very well understand the reason why early Muslims never used this expression. The expression did not appeal to them probably because they thought that it implied a false conception of the historical process. The Magian mind regarded Time as a circular movement; the glory of elucidating the true nature of the historical process as a perpetually creative movement was reserved for the great Muslim thinker and historian, Ibn Khaldën.

THE INTENSITY OF FEELING WHICH THE INDIAN MUSLIMS HAVE MANIFESTED IN OPPOSITION TO THE QADIANI MOVEMENT IS, THEREFORE, PERFECTLY INTELLIGIBLE TO THE STUDENT OF MODERN SOCIOLOGY.

HE WAS CRITICISED BY THE Q«DÎNÂ JOURNAL *THE LIGHT*. IN THE SAME SEQUEL THE PRESS INTERVIEWED HIM. ONE OF HIS REJOINDERS IS REVEALING FOR THE ISSUE THAT WE ARE TRYING TO ANALYSE.

QUESTIONED ABOUT THE TRADITION QUOTED BY *THE LIGHT* ABOUT THE *MUJADDID* HE REPLIED:⁹⁹

WHILE I DO BELIEVE IN MAN’S SPIRITUAL CAPACITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THE BIRTH OF SPIRITUAL MEN, I AM NOT SURE THAT THE HISTORICAL PROCESS IS SO MATHEMATICAL AS THE LIGHT THINKS. WE CAN EASILY CONFESS THAT IT IS BEYOND OUR

⁹⁸ *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, IAP, Lahore, 1995, pp. 198-9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.203-4.

INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY TO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE HISTORICAL PROCESS. ALL THAT I CAN NEGATIVELY SAY IS THAT IT DOES NOT APPEAR TO ME TO BE AS FIXED AND MATHEMATICALLY EXACT AS THE LIGHT THINKS. I AM RATHER INCLINED TO IBN KHALDĒN'S VIEW, WHICH REGARDS THE HISTORICAL PROCESS AS A FREE CREATIVE MOVEMENT AND NOT A PROCESS WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN WORKED OUT WITH DEFINITE LANDMARKS. THIS VIEW HAS BEEN PUT FORWARD IN MODERN TIMES BY BERGSON WITH MUCH GREATER WEALTH OF ILLUSTRATION AND SCIENTIFIC ACCURACY THAN BY IBN KHALDĒN. THE TRADITION QUOTED BY THE LIGHT WAS PROBABLY POPULARISED BY JAL«L-UD-DĀN SUYĒTĀ IN HIS OWN INTEREST AND MUCH IMPORTANCE CANNOT BE ATTACHED TO IT. IT IS NOT MENTIONED IN BUKH«RĀ AND MUSLIM, THE TWO BOOKS, WHICH ARE BELIEVED TO BE MOST RELIABLE. IT MAY EMBODY A VISION OF THE NATURE OF THE HISTORICAL PROCESS BY SOME SPIRITUAL MEN, BUT THIS PERSONAL VISION OF THE INDIVIDUALS CAN FORM NO BASIS FOR LOGICAL ARGUMENT. THIS IS THE RULE WHICH EXPERT TRADITIONISTS HAVE ALWAYS OBSERVED.

Questioned about the possibility of divine inspiration and the advent of inspired reformers after the Holy Prophet he replied by referring to the page 120-1 of his *Reconstruction*, but added:¹⁰⁰

INDEED AS LONG AS THE SPIRITUAL CAPACITY OF MANKIND ENDURES, THEY WILL RISE AMONG ALL NATIONS AND COUNTRIES IN ORDER TO SHOW BETTER IDEALS OF LIFE TO MAN. TO HOLD OTHERWISE WOULD BE TO FLY IN THE FACE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT THE MODERN MAN HAS THE RIGHT TO CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THEIR MYSTIC EXPERIENCES. THE FINALITY OF THE PROPHETHOOD MEANS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT ALL PERSONAL AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE, DENIAL OF WHICH INVOLVES DAMNATION, HAS COME TO AN END.

Next year, in 1936, Iqbal published his response to the criticism that came from the pen of Pundit Nehru. Here is a pertinent remark:¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.206-7.

IS INDIA DĀR-UL-ĀRAB OR DĀR-UL-ISLĀM? WHAT IS THE REAL MEANING OF THE DOCTRINE OF JIHĀD IN ISLAM? WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE EXPRESSION “FROM AMONGST YOU” IN THE QUR’ĀNIC VERSE: “OBEY GOD, OBEY THE PROPHET AND THE MASTERS OF THE AFFAIRS (I.E. RULERS) FROM AMONGST YOU?” WHAT IS THE CHARACTER OF THE TRADITIONS OF THE PROPHET FORETELLING THE ADVENT OF IMĀM MAHDĀ? THESE QUESTIONS AND SOME OTHERS, WHICH AROSE SUBSEQUENTLY, WERE, FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, QUESTIONS FOR INDIAN MUSLIMS ONLY. EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM, HOWEVER, WHICH WAS THEN RAPIDLY PENETRATING THE WORLD OF ISLAM WAS ALSO INTIMATELY INTERESTED IN THEM. THE CONTROVERSIES, WHICH THESE QUESTIONS CREATED, FORM THE MOST INTERESTING CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF ISLAM IN INDIA. THE STORY IS A LONG ONE AND IS STILL WAITING FOR A POWERFUL PEN. MUSLIM POLITICIANS WHOSE EYES WERE MAINLY FIXED ON THE REALITIES OF THE SITUATION SUCCEEDED IN WINNING OVER A SECTION OF THE ULEMA TO ADOPT A LINE OF THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT WHICH, AS THEY THOUGHT, SUITED THE SITUATION; BUT IT WAS NOT EASY TO CONQUER BY MERE LOGIC THE BELIEFS WHICH HAD RULED FOR CENTURIES THE CONSCIENCE OF THE MASSES OF ISLAM IN INDIA. IN SUCH A SITUATION LOGIC CAN EITHER PROCEED ON THE GROUND OF POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY OR ON THE LINES OF A FRESH ORIENTATION OF TEXTS AND TRADITIONS. IN EITHER CASE THE ARGUMENT WILL FAIL TO APPEAL TO THE MASSES. TO THE INTENSELY RELIGIOUS MASSES OF ISLAM ONLY ONE THING CAN MAKE A CONCLUSIVE APPEAL, AND THAT IS DIVINE AUTHORITY.

Replying to Ākām MuĀammad Āusayn ‘Arshâ in 1936, he wrote:

The word “Mahdâ” does not denote any specific personality. Rather it means any one who could send shock waves into the realm of ideas.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.225-6.

¹⁰² *Iqbal Nama*, Sh. M. Ashraf, Lahore, 1951, Vol. I, p. 33. The same idea is expressed in the poem “Mahdâ i bar Āq”, see *Kulliyat i Iqbal*, IAP, Lahore, 1994, p. 557. See note 19.

ﺃﺭﺏ ﻱ ﻛﺎﻟﺎﻡ (PUBLISHED VIC. 1936) CONTAINS TWO SHORT POEMS ENTITLED, “MAHDÂ” AND “MAHDÂ I BAR Â«Q”.¹⁰³

ADD URDU

IQBAL’S POSITION

In view of the foregoing we can form a cumulative idea of Iqbal’s position on the issue of Mahdâ amidst the settled convictions of his community.

In all probability, Iqbal did not feel inclined to accept all those reports as authentic that spoke of the advent of Mahdâ as a fixed historical event. He is not alone in maintaining this view. He is following in the footsteps of a large number of scholars of the old who regarded these reports to be weak to such an extent that one could almost relegate these to the rank of forged traditions. They cannot serve as a basis for a ruling nor for determining an object of faith. Therefore, it is understandable if he did not take these reports into consideration.

However, the concept of Mahdâ had gained an archetypal status among the Muslims of South and East Asia and as a “settled conviction” it had encompassed almost every concept of historical process and historical change. Iqbal, hence, adopted it as a symbol of the ‘leader or guide’ of the ummah not as a personification. In other words, the function of Mahdâ and the qualifications that such a function required were taken over by Iqbal while keeping its historical manifestation unknown, non-personified and unidentified.

These qualifications are the same as required for man to regain his centrality and perfection in the universal order of existence. Iqbal’s ideal human being is an embodiment of these attributes. He designates it in various ways and calls it by different titles. One of these titles is Madhâ. One could ask oneself the question as to what did Iqbal expect from such a

¹⁰³ See *Kulliyat i Iqbal*, IAP, Lahore, 1994, pp. 557 and 572.

person? The answer is clear. It is an extension of the prophetic function without its law giving aspect or its characteristic claim of religious authority; charismatic, universal, magnificent and adorned with all the inward and outward perfections. Iqbal's Madhâ is the most perfect non- prophetic model of the human reality endowed with the power to lead humanity from its waning phase of utmost historical and religious decline to the restoration of its human perfection. To this extent he is in agreement with the "settled conviction" but he does not accept the modalities of its historical manifestations as commonly accepted by the wide spread, but inauthentic, opinion of the masses. Here he departs from the received wisdom on the subject. This attitude is grounded, contrary to the commonly held view of his ambivalence towards Àadâth literature, in a prudent and careful approach to the corpus of Àadâth and, in this sense it is more akin to the approach of the early day scholars than that of his contemporaries.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

* The initial draft of this article was presented as the Presidential Address to the Annual Qur'anic Lectures arranged by the Markazi Anjuman i Khuddam i Qur'an— 1-4 November 1998. The following remarks preceded the Address.

As is required of a chief guest, I would prefer to begin my comments by expressing my gratitude for receiving the honour that has been conferred on me. It is indeed a privilege. But these stock phrases and expressions have a deeper significance and a ring of personal connotation as well. I am not ripe in years even today but fifteen years ago, when I was still younger, I published the first volume of *Rimḡyat*¹⁰⁴ which dealt with metaphysics, cosmology, civilisation and cultural issues, philosophy, tradition and Sufism. Reviewing the

¹⁰⁴ *Rimḡyat*, No. 1, Lahore, 1983.

volume, a wise and witty writer came up with a consummate remark that depicted my person *vis á vis* my literary accomplishment. The title was borrowed from Ghalib's verse

URDU verse

O thou self-reliant and self-contained lad

Thy staff rises higher than your height."

I must confess that I face a similar embarrassment today. The subject that our learned speaker has brought to our attention is once again "higher than my height" and I am goaded to say that, in a sense, I have been tricked into accepting the offer. Dr. AbÄ«r lured me in when he made me agree to participate in the lecture series by invoking Iqbal and other topics of mutual interest.¹⁰⁵ I was taken in. It was only when the paper of Mr. Imr«n N. Àosseïn crossed my desk that I was alerted to the problem. Dr AbÄ«r AÁmad had over estimated me. So if my discourse falls short of your expectations I offer my apologies in advance.

¹⁰⁵ The Address was delivered as the presidential remarks to the first lecture in the series.