

**Turkish
Journal of
Shiite
Studies**

Şiilik Araştırmaları

ISSN: 2687-1882

**Cilt / Volume: 2
Sayı / Issue: 1
Haziran / June 2020**

Some Notes on the Mahdi Perception in Contemporary Shi'ism

Çağdaş Şiilik'te Mehdi Algısı Üzerine Bazı Notlar

Cemil Hakyemez

*Prof. Dr., Hitit Üniversitesi, İlahiyat Fakültesi, İslam Mezhepleri Tarihi Anabilim Dalı
Prof. Dr., Hitit University, Faculty of Theology, Department of History of Islamic Sects
Çorum / Turkey*

chyemez@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0525-1293>

Makale Bilgisi/Article Information

Makale Türü/Article Type: Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

* This article is the developed version of my paper titled "Günümüz İran Şiiliğinde Mehdi Beklentisinin Siyasi Boyutu" published by Cumhuriyet University under the title of *Uluslararası Mehdilik Sempozyumu Bildirileri* (Sivas, 2017).

Geliş Tarihi / Received: 02.04.2020

Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 18.05.2020

Yayın Tarihi / Published: 30.06.2020

Cilt/Volume: 2 Sayı/Issue: 1 Sayfa/Pages: 6-16

Atıf/Cite as: Hakyemez, Cemil, "Some Notes on the Mahdi Perception in Contemporary Shi'ism", *Turkish Journal of Shiite Studies* 2/1 (Haziran 2020): 6-16.

İntihal: Bu makale, *iThenticate* yazılımınca taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

Plagiarism: This article has been scanned by *iThenticate*. No plagiarism detected.

Web: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/siader> **mailto:** turkishshiiestudies@gmail.com

Some Notes on the Mahdi Perception in Contemporary Shi'ism

Abstract: The thought of the Mahdi is one of the main beliefs of Imamiyya. According to Imamiyya, Twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi entered into occultation in 873. This disappearance of her will continue until the Apocalypse. For this reason, this thought has been occupying the minds of the Imamites for more than a thousand years. They tried to create all political and belief systems accordingly. But according to Shi'ite Imamiyya, no situation would necessarily require the return of Mehdi. However, the ulama, sitting at the center of politics with the Islamic Republic of Iran, needed some new tools to make its legitimacy permanent. In this context, they focus on religious arguments to demonstrate that they have fulfilled their responsibilities for the people and to promote their expansion policies outside Iran. For this reason, this is why the narrations of Mahdi which constitute a considerable amount in the Classical Shi'ite books, are reinterpreted and tired to keep them alive.

Keywords: Shi'ism, Mahdi, Imamiyya, Contemporary Shi'ism, Iran

Öz: Mehdi düşüncesi, İmamiyye'nin en önemli inançlarından biridir. İmamiyye'ye göre Onikinci İmam Muhammed el-Mehdi 873 yılında gaybete girmiştir. Onun bu durumu Kıyamet gününe kadar devam edecektir. Bundan dolayı bu düşünce bin yıldan daha fazla bir süreden beri İmamilerin zihninin meşgul etmektedir. Tüm politik ve inanç sistemlerini buna göre oluşturmaktadırlar. Fakat İmamiyye Şiası'na göre günümüzde Mehdi'nin dönüşünü zorunlu olarak gerektirecek bir durum söz konusu değildir. Ancak İran İslam Cumhuriyeti ile birlikte siyasetin merkezine oturan ulema, kendi meşruiyetini daim kılacak yeni birtakım araçlara ihtiyaç duymuştur. Bu çerçevede hem kendi halkına karşı olan sorumluluklarını yerine getirdiklerini göstermek, hem de İran dışına yayılma politikalarını teşvik etmek amacıyla dini argümanlara ağırlık vermektedirler. Şii kaynaklar içerisinde önemli bir yekûn oluşturan "mehdi" rivayetlerinin tekrardan yorumlanarak sürekli canlı tutulmaya çalışılması da bu sebepten dolayı olsa gerektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şiilik, Mehdi, İmamiyye, Çağdaş Şiilik, İran

Introduction

The idea of "expected savior" known as "Mahdi" in Islamic thought is the liberation ideology of the societies that constantly feel under pressure. This idea was a very important hope of salvation for those who dissatisfied with the political powers in the early period and who thought that a certain lineage or person would get them rid of the pressure by seizing power. For this reason, the literature about Mahdship has been shaped and developed in line with the practical interests of the Shi'ite groups opposed to power.

It seems that the Sunni understanding of Mahdship was formed on the basis of some accounts that have been fabricated in the form hadiths as a result of some events in the past rather than practical needs, and that have reached today in the hadith collections. Therefore, it is understood that the current issues and the ulama trying to find solutions for them do not have much effect on the formation of the Sunni understanding of Mahdship. However, on this issue, we should keep the Sufis apart, who deal with this issue for their own practical purposes and interpret the existing material accordingly, and Ashab al-Hadith who makes it a principle to adhere to the hadith literature.

Carrying certain batinite elements such as "Mahdship" and "Deputyship of Mahdi" into Sufism by way of some mystical Shi'ites like Hallaj al-Mansûr (d. 309/921), the Sufis pioneered their inclusion in the Ahl al-Sunnah. It is known that, as another group, the Sufis' carrying the narrations about Mahdi into the hadith

literature is related to the fall of the Umayyads and then the events such as "Mihna (inquisition)" in the Abbasid period.

In fact, Sunniism in the mind of fuqaha did not hold that a fair state would be established in the future. On the contrary, they did not have the expectation of Mahdi, most probably as they preceded to overcome the current problems and improve the conditions of their time. However, they did not dare to directly oppose the hadiths, as they were fixed in the hadith books. We can say that since they found these narrations, so to say, ready in their arms; they could not refuse them or accept. Their statements that they accepted them are not based on a claim or proof more than emotionality. The policy of ignorance between rejection and acceptance reflects the general attitude in the mind of the Sunni ulama from past to present. Therefore, some Muslim scholars such as Ibn Khaldun suggested about Mahdship different ideas independent from traditional literature.

1. The Mahdi and His Functions in Today's Imamiyya

First of all, in order to comprehend today's Shi'ite-Imamite concept of mahdship, it is necessary to go through the formation process of this idea. This is essential as the Imamite ulama tried to solve the imamate crisis during the end of the third/ninth century by developing the idea of "the occultation of the Twelfth Imam" and claimed that the imam who disappeared was in fact the "expected mahdi".¹ At the center of the changes and transformations of Imamite thought since then, there have always been some matters discussed such as Mahdi himself, his occultation, his return, his duties, and the deputyship of the Mahdi.

While the Shiites tried to explain these matters within the framework of changing social and political conditions, they also developed their own theological structure and religious institutions. Imamite scholars such as Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (d. 381/991), Shaikh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022), and Sharif al-Murtada (d. 436/1044) put remarkable literature to convince the Imamite Shiites. They gained the support of the Buyids (334-447/945-1055), who took the control of the Abbasid caliphate from the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, and soon the support of the Mongol ruler Uljaytu (r. 703-716/1304-1316). In their works, it is argued that some duties considered to be that of the Mahdi could be undertaken by the ulama themselves.

With the Safavid State (907-1148/1501-1736), in which Imamite Shia was adopted as an official sect after the support of Buyids and Uljaytu, we see that the political powers of Mahdi began to be transferred to the ulama. The Imamite scholar Ali b. Hossein al-Karakī (d. 1553)'s comments on the authorization of politics on this matter are very important. However, during the period of Nadir Shah, Zend Dynasty, Qajars and Pahlavis who ruled Iran after the Safavids, there were serious problems between the ulama representing Imamite Shia and political powers. Therefore, apart from Molla Ahmad Naraqī (d. 1832)'s some expansion of authority, there was no significant difference in interpreting the political part of Mahdship. The real transfer of authority became evident with Khomeini's concept of "velayet-e faqih (guardianship of the jurist)".

It was Abu Jafar al-Tusi who first clearly stated that Imam's authority

¹ Cemil Hakyemez, *Şîa'da Gaybet İnanç ve Gâib On İkinci İmamel-Mehdî* (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2017), 160-165.

should be transferred in his occultation to the fuqaha.² However, as we have stated above, al-Karakī (d. 1533) was the first to suggest that some of these authorities can be performed by the “official ulama”. During this period, the Shiite ulama started to take an active part in the administration in line with his fatwas. By the time of the Qajars era, Naraqī’s activities took this issue further. By writing his work *‘Awā’id al-Ayyām*, he expanded the authority of the ulama and insisted that they should take more responsibility for political issues. By the time of the Constitutional Period, the lack of political administration and the status of the ulama began to be discussed. Therefore, Ayatollah Mirza Hossein Naini (d. 1936) associated the issue with the law and claimed that the scholars should control the parliament and laws. As a result of nearly five-century background, their thoughts were theorized by the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989)³, and then were reflected in political practice.

According to Khomeini’s “velayat-e faqih” system, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the “rahbar” who is also the chief representative of the Gaib Imam, and this authority has been deposited divinely. Current rahbar Ali Khamenei expresses the issue as follows: “Velayat-e faqih is not an issue invented by the elite and jurist experts council (Majles-e Khobregan); velayat-e faqih is something revealed by Allah”.⁴ Even, he and those who agree with him go further and see no harm in equalizing this authority with the imamate.⁵

The fact that the ulama, the representatives of the Imamite Shia in Iran, took a central role based on their understanding of “velayat-e faqih” and then turned it into a state as a political structure, represents an important phase. In other words, following the collapse of the Safavid State, the administration and officially accepted sect was the Imamiyya/Ithna’ashariyya and as part of this change the ulema were actively involved in politics, this was the Islamic Republic of Iran represented. This state was established in 1979 with the Iranian Islamic Revolution, led by Khomeini, and the state accepted the Imamiyya/Ithna’ashariyya Shiism as its official sect. The fact that Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution, presented the concept of “velayat-e faqih” as the basis of the state and claimed that all authority of the Concealed Imam Mahdi belonged to them i.e. ulama, and officially implemented them in the name of Gaib Imam, led them to develop a discourse that they implemented all their policies on behalf of Mahdi.

However, Velayat-e faqih was not an absolutely accepted system among Imami ulama in Iran. However, as some of the opposing scholars were punished, the number of opponents gradually decreased. For example, the Hujjatiya movement, known for its anti-Bahaite stance at the time of its establishment, also opposed the political activities for the advent of Mahdi. For, according to them, an Islamic state could only be established with Mahdi. Mahmoud Halabi stated that he received some signs from Gaib Imam in this direction. Therefore, he opposed

² Abu Ja’far al-Tûsî, *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*, (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1365), 90.

³ The main goal of Khomeini was to end the Shah administration. Since velayat-e faqih seems to be the next issue, he did not have much information about how it would be in practice. This issue started to intensify in France in 1978 when the prospects of a new state and a new constitution appeared. Ronen A. Cohen, *İran Hücçetiye Cemiyeti*, trans. Mehmet Toprak, (İyidüşün Yayınları, 2014), 145.

⁴ Ayetullah Seyyid Ali Hamaneî, *İmam Mehdi ve Zuhur*, (Tesnim Yayınları, 2015), 113.

⁵ It is stated as follows: “Some say that velayat-e faqih should not be called Imam. But this statement is essentially wrong; for someone who is at the head of the Islamic community has the power to rule and must be mentioned with this suffix.” Komisyon, *İngiliz Şiiliği’nin Perde Arkası ve Uyduruk Merciiyyet*, (İstanbul: Önsöz Yayıncılık, 2017), 148.

Khomeini's rhetoric since the 1960s and attracted attention. The supporters of Khomeini naturally took a stand against them and their ideas.⁶

In fact, Shiism, which is nationalized around the velayat-e faqih system, seems to be the administration of the fuqaha on the one hand, it gives the signs of a move towards Iranization on the other. The revolution and the system on which it was based made the guide (rahbar) the head of the religious authority. This leads to the weakening of the power of the non-Iranian transnational Shiite ulama, such as the Sistani and Sadr family.⁷

Whether you accept the concept of "velayat-e faqih" or not, waiting for the advent of the Mahdi in Imamite Shiism stands as one of the pillars of the faith. However, in our study entitled "*Şia'da Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnancı ve Günümüzdeki Yansımaları [The Belief of Expected Savior in Shiism and Its Current Reflections]*"⁸, we tried to express that there is no longer a practical value for the Imamite Shi'ites on the matter of waiting for the Mahdi in today Iran and Iraq. The general understanding stated within that research is as follows: Despite the fact that the Imamite scholars stated that the returning of the Twelfth Imam as the Mahdi as a part of their faith, they eventually reconciled in their own right that he would not come by delaying his return until the Day of Judgment hence blocked off all current and future Mahdi claims. In other words, in the absence of the Mahdi, it is no longer possible to suspend his special duties and these duties are now carried out by the jurists themselves on his behalf. However, since the social aspect of the issue and the dimension of international relations are still quite alive and dynamic, we see that the functions of the Mahdi are very suitable for use. Imamite rulers still frequently use the narrations about the Mahdi to persuade and encourage their public opinion.

Shiite administrators who wanted to be superior in their geography and expand their area of sovereignty add a different dimension to the events by manipulating the issue and interpreting the expectations of Mahdi in line with their interests in accordance with their current conditions. Their efforts are simplified with the numerous narrations related to this subject in both their own literature and Sunni sources which facilitated their orientation efforts. Iranian, Iraqi and other regional Shiites, most of whom are uneducated and live at low economic standards, showed high respect to the ulama and their traditional rhetoric. Therefore, the Occulted Twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi and the issue of his return gained great popularity among the cities of Qom and Mashhad as well as the citizens living in the countryside.

We see that the devoted Shiite of the nation use the term "God hasten his reappearance" (ajjil farajahum) at the end of almost every sentence. This group of the nation somewhat believes that the Mahdi is living among them. The scholars who guide them tell their supporters that the Occulted Imam constantly observe them and that they will be able to feel the Imam in their hearts only if they wish with true sincerity. There is no one simple prayer which they conduct that does not include the name of the Mahdi. They believe that Mahdi comes to the Jamkaran Mosque in Qom at a certain time. Therefore, gathering people here, throwing off the letter by those who want to convey their wishes to a well next to the masjid, and

⁶ Cohen, *İran Hüccetiye Cemiyeti*, 111, 149.

⁷ Roy-Khosrokhavar, *İran: Bir Devrimin Tükenişi*, trans. İsmail Yergüz, (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2013), 54-56.

⁸ Cemil Hakyemez, "*Şia'da Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnancı ve Günümüzdeki Yansımaları*", *Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnancı*, ed. Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, (İstanbul: KURAMER Yayınları, 2017), 109-112.

thinking that it has reached Mahdi are very vivid religious and social facts that the Shiite people show great respect.

The official religious leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, expresses his perception of Mahdi as such: "Shiites, unlike other sects, know who the Mahdi is. This issue is not just a mental perception and desire, it is backed up by concrete reality. Since the interlocutors are certain, Shia put forward a more lively and exciting intercession. The sultan of the hearts and the unique love of the lovers, the precious person of the hearts has been seen and he himself has visited many of our elders during this timespan. That precious person lives amongst us; he is not separate and unaware of his supporters. He is always among the people, and the people will attain the majority, guidance, conquest, and glory by showing him favour towards him and getting closer to him."⁹

Ali Khamenei and other Iranian rulers have developed a discourse of which they seem to be carrying out their social and political practices on behalf of Mahdi as they see themselves as the true representatives of the Mahdi. In this direction, they try to explain the arrival of the Mahdi with current political events and narrations that evoke them. Marji' Taqlid Naser Makarem Shirazi claimed that during the "International Conference of Mahdaviat Doctrine" held in Qom, Rahbar Ali Khamenei was in contact with imam Muhammad al-Mahdi.¹⁰

The importance of Mahdi in Iran is expressed by Doctor Fahreddin Sevket, who visited Iran in the early 20th century, as: "The word 'Sahib al-Zaman' has such a fascinating and extraordinary effect on the Iranians that nothing else can reach it."¹¹

2. The Mahdi in Current Political Events

According to the claims of Iranian administrators and jurists close to them; "whether it is Abrahamic or not, the only milestone that people can gather around and form unity is Mahdaviat".¹² Accordingly, they see the Islamic Revolution of Iran as a sign of the appearance of the Mahdi. This is so that the Iranian people perceive the return of the leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, from France to Iran as the return of the Mahdi.¹³ They stated that the task of the new army formed with the Revolution was to fight against the USA and Israel, who wanted to prevent the coming of the Mahdi.¹⁴ They interpret the narration that "a brave man from the Hashemites will emerge with black flags in Khorasan and hand over the Islamic flag to Christ" as follows: "The army meant in the narration is the Iranian army, and the brave man is the current rahbar Ayatollah Ali Khamenei". There are even those who claim that the person named as "Yemeni" expressed in the hadiths about the Mahdi is Hassan Nasrallah, who sees him as a soldier of Ayatollah Khamenei.

The Iranian administrators are not the only ones who claim the "velayat-e faqih" doctrine as there are also others who are interested in the return of the Mahdi or put forward the saying that they are acting on his behalf. Even if not politically, the idea that jurists are the true representatives of the Mahdi is a generally accepted matter among the Imamites. The Shiite Imamite masses also adopted this and

⁹ Ayetullah Seyyid Ali Hamaneî, *İmam Mehdi ve Zuhur*, (Tesnim Yayınları, 2015), 24, 29-30, 90.

¹⁰ Mustafa Melih Ahışalı, "Hamaney'in Mehdi'yle İrtibatı Olduğu İddiası", *Anadolu Ajansı AA* (20 May 2016).

¹¹ Doctor Fahreddin Şevket, *Îrân*, ed. Derya Örs, (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 2017), 66.

¹² Komisyon, *İngiliz Şiiliği'nin Perde Arkası ve Uyduruk Merciiyyet*, 43.

¹³ Ethem Ruhi Fıglalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, (İzmir, 2004), 358.

¹⁴ Kasım Cindemir, "Ey Müslümanlar Mehdi Geliyor Birleşelim", *Hürriyet* (19 August 2009).

created a "marji' taqlid" institution in the mid-19th century. Today, every Imamite individual has to be connected to a scholar who is accepted to be a "marji' taqlid". In their eyes, these people are also representatives of Mahdi. For example, Mukteda al-Sadr's constitution of a union called "Mahdi Army" is based on this understanding. This military union showed strength in Kirkuk for an armed fight against ISIS, after Sistani's call for jihad.

Among the Imamites, the following direction draws attention: "Imam Mahdi will appear in Makkah, cross over to Jerusalem, Damascus and Iran, and Iranians will go to Basra and fight Sufyani together with their Khorasani guides' Shuayb b. Muslim, then the Mahdi will go to Iraq from there and Jerusalem will be his ultimate destination." Accordingly, the issues that he will deal with before reaching the final destination include the correction of the situation of Iraq and the arrangement of the works there by traveling between Iran, Iraq, Hejaz, and Yemen. In other words, they try to legitimize and even encourage the Iranian army to go to Iraq and Yemen by using this discourse. It is evident that what they mean by al-Sufyani's army is the Western powers and their supporters, furthermore with the expression "supporters", they are targeting the Saudi Arabian government and their supporting states. Finally, the mission of the Mahdi is further exalted, with a final goal of "annihilating the state of Israel by going to Jerusalem", which will relieve the hearts of all Muslims.

Some who regard the issue as Iran's political benefits attribute the arrival of the Mahdi to the Syria issue in particular. Kays al-Hazali, the director of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, one of the groups affiliated with al-Hashd al-Sha'bi, expresses his thoughts on this matter as follows: "The emergence of the Twelfth Imam Mahdi al-Muntazar is very close. At that time, Revolutionary Guards in Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Ansarullah (Houthis) in Yemen, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq in Syria and Iraq, and their brothers will form a large Shia region from Iran to the Mediterranean. Our organization acts towards the "Shia Full Moon" target rather than the "Shia Crescent" aim."¹⁵

3. Updating Narrations

As other religions and sects, Imamite traditionalists talk about some signs taking place in the narrations about the Mahdi, in other words about "Kaim" which will appear before the arrival of him. Especially the earlier sources draw attention to the five events that will take place before his reign; "Yemenite, Sufyanite, a bellman shouting from the sky, the collapse of the Sahara and the death of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya."¹⁶ There are many narrations like these in Sunnite and Shiite hadith books. Actually, these narrations came forward about some events that happened towards the end of Umayyads. However, when these narratives were recorded as "hadith" over time, they were interpreted with different events each time, and even new versions of these narratives were produced under the current conditions of our day.

Although events such as "a bellman shouting from the sky" and "collapse of the field" are always possible issues under the conditions mentioned above, the emergence of Sufyani and Yemeni have been interpreted in line with political issues

¹⁵ Faruk Önalın, "Amaç 'Şii Hilali'nden Öte 'Şii Dolunayı'", *Sanal Basın* (19 January 2020), <http://www.sanalbasin.com/amac-sii-hilalinden-ote-sii-dolunayi-34257372>.

¹⁶ Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (al-Shaykh al-Saduq), *Kamal al-din wa tamam al-ni'mah*, (Qum: *Dâr al-kutub al-islâmiyya*, 1395/1975), 2/649.

and have been associated with certain events in Basra and Yemen. Similar conditions are more current today. The US invasion of Iraq and the Persian Gulf along with the military operation of the Saud-supported military units in Yemen towards the Shiite Houthis are the primary ones.

The famous preacher of Iran, Hujjat al-Islam Alireza Panahian, said in his speech about the Shiites who died in the conflict in Yemen in May 2015, referring to a narration attributed to Prophet Mohammed: "Let the believers and revolutionary young people all over the world write "I am from Yemen" on their breasts. The widespread use of this hadith by the friends of the Yemeni people will frighten the enemies. If this principle becomes widespread, it will provide suitable conditions for the emergence of 'Imam-ı Zaman', and the guiding role of 'Sanjak of Yemani' will be better understood. We believe that the Yemeni people will change the course of history. I hope the events in Yemen are the preparatory phase of the first sign of the emergence. The root of all the troubles of the Islamic world lies in the suffering of Haramain Sharifain in the captivity of the vile Saud family. The flag that the Yemeni people shouldered is the herald of the rescue of Haramain Sharifain. The evil behavior of the enemies of Yemen is one of the secret graces of Allah and this has increased the prudence and unity of the people of this country."¹⁷

In a speech he made to the public in the city of Amol, Iran's former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad pointed out the attacks against Yemen and made the following claim: "The arrogant tyrants are trying to control humanity by using certain administrations. The Saudi dynasty attacking Iraq is in the process of extinction." In the following of his speech, he said: "Good news that the sun of justice, which is the descendant of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali, will soon come and ruin the arrogant."¹⁸

Mahmud Ahmedinejad previously made a speech that heralded the arrival of Mahdi being very soon, during the 67th General Assembly of the United Nations on September 26, 2012. He indicated that cruelty, poverty, race, sect and religion separations would disappear and equality, justice, peace, and abundance would come to the world with his arrival. Rahbar Ali Khamenei, also claimed the return of Mahdi being soon, so he stated that the armed forces should unite all Muslim countries, including Turkey.¹⁹ The Iranian administration led by him chose a place symbolized as the place of the Mahdi for the revenge of the Commander of the Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani, who was killed on 3 January 2020 as a result of the US attack. In this direction, they put a red flag on the minaret of the Jamkaran Mosque (The Sahib al-Zaman Masjid) in Qom which symbolised a declaration of war. It is stated that such a situation was experienced for the first time in history.²⁰

From what we have stated so far it can be seen that the current Iranian rulers are reinterpreting the narratives about his (Mahdi's) coming to legitimize Iranian political rule in statements as they use the name of the Mahdi as both for political leader and also a representative of the religion. According to the narrations, the right state was to be established only with the Mahdi. So what kind of judgment should we make regarding the situation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was

¹⁷ Safaasya, "İran'dan Hz. Mehdi As Müjdesi Geldi", (Access 15 March 2020).

¹⁸ Safaasya, "İran'dan Hz. Mehdi As Müjdesi Geldi".

¹⁹ Cindemir, "Ey Müslümanlar Mehdi Geliyor Birleşelim".

²⁰ Karar, "İran Tarihinde Bir İlk! Savaş Anlamına Gelen Kırmızı Bayrağı Göndere Çekti" (4 January 2020). This mosque is very important for Imamites. According to narrations, a person named Hassan ibn Muthlih dreams Gaib 12th Imam Mohammed Mahdi in his dream in 373/983 and a masjid is built here upon the order from him.

established before the arrival of the Mahdi?

Ali Khamenei interpreted the issue as follows: People understood the flag in the narration, "Every banner that will rise before the appearance of the Mahdi will be false," as "state and government". Whereas this narration was said to be "whoever appeared with the banner of the Mahdi", that is, it is meant that claims to be the "Mahdi".²¹

From Ali Khamenei's statements, it can be understood that the link between the establishment of the "right state" and the emergence of Gaib Twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi has actually been severed. We have already stated this as follows: "The promised Mehdi gave up most of his powers by transferring his noble functions to the clerics, limiting himself to his role as a savior who would only come close to the Apocalypse and organize things. The only difference is that those who go ahead in the persecution against the Shia and the oppressed Shiites are resurrected before the apocalypse and take the revenge of the oppressed from the oppressors. This has no response in real life. Again, although it is believed that Mahdi, who continues to live out of sight in occultation, especially helps the needy people, there is no visible and demonstrable concrete aspect of this."²²

Today, the ulama, who advocate the view of "velayat-e faqih", try to benefit from this by reinterpreting the belief of the Mahdi in accordance with social and political conditions, although it is not a practical answer for them to wait for the Mahdi, as some scholars before the Revolution did. However, there was practically no response for them to wait for the Mahdi. Despite this, they try to keep this idea alive by emphasizing traditional narratives such as "the highest worship of the umma is to wait for his emergence and salvation"²³ because of the importance of this issue, since it is the main source of their legitimacy. Again, in this context, they claim that 120 verses point to the appearance of the Mahdi, based on the hadiths and narrations narrated from innocent imams.²⁴ Based on the most frequent narrations, the following is said about Mahdi:

"Actually, Sahib al-Zaman's birthday is the biggest holiday for Muslims. It is even the biggest holiday not only for Muslims but for all humanity." "Mid of Sha'ban night (the night that Mahdi is allegedly born) is a very blessed and reputed night. Just like Qadr nights. Worshipping is very rewarding this night, and this night is the best time for tawassul and asking from Allah. They take our book of deeds to Imam al-Zaman. According to some narrations, the book of deeds is taken to Imam al-Zaman in a week or two."²⁵

In the expectations of the expected savior or the Mahdi, each passing time hopes for a rapprochement for salvation. In other words, the time is getting shorter for his arrival, so hopes are increasing. This situation is expressed by Ali Khamenei as follows: "Today, humanity is buried with greater cruelty and injustice compared to past periods, and the ingenuity of humanity has increased and developed due to development. Now we are approaching the era of Imam al-Zaman, the age of this true love of people. Because ingenuity has increased and improved."²⁶ Alireza Panahian, one of the names close to Ali Khamenei, also suggested that the

²¹ Hamane'i, *Imam Mehdi ve Zuhur*, 102.

²² Hakyemez, "Şia'da Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnancı ve Günümüzdeki Yansımaları", 109-112.

²³ Hamane'i, *Imam Mehdi ve Zuhur*, 61.

²⁴ Hamane'i, *Imam Mehdi ve Zuhur*, 13.

²⁵ Hamane'i, *Imam Mehdi ve Zuhur*, 100, 22, 83.

²⁶ Hamane'i, *Imam Mehdi ve Zuhur*, 26.

coronavirus epidemic, which caused the death of many people both in the world and in Iran, is an important sign for the return of the Mahdi.²⁷

Conclusion

The statements made by Ali Khamenei above and all that we have mentioned so far, lead us to understand the following; according to Imamiyya, no situation would necessarily require the return of Mahdi. However, the ulama, sitting at the center of politics with the Islamic Republic of Iran, needed some new tools to make its legitimacy permanent. In this context, they focus on religious arguments to demonstrate that they have fulfilled their responsibilities towards their own people and to promote their expansion policies outside Iran. For this reason, it is necessary to try to be kept this alive by reinterpreting the narrations of “Mahdi”, which constitute an important one among the Imamite classical books. A similar situation was brought up by the famous Iranian writer Daryush Shayegan at the beginning of the Revolution.

According to Shayegan, the People’s Mojahedin gathered the discourses of the Marxists and religionists and put them into practice. In this direction, they united Marx and the Prophet Muhammad and made the “world revolution” a harbinger of the emergence of the Expected Imam, which had no other task but to wait for the destruction of the cruel government.²⁸

Shayegan’s emphasis on the “Marxist discourse” about the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 was very accurate in that period. However, today’s world has entered a time in which the Marxist discourses no longer have much of an effect on the oppressed masses after the USSR, which dissolved in 1991. Traditional revolutionary discourse is not widely accepted by the new generation of Iranians. Particularly with religious groups of youth beginning to prefer traditional discourses over it. Those who are not religious speak the liberal libertarian rhetoric of the West and criticize Islamists strongly.

After Mohammed Khatami won the presidential election on 22 May 1997, millions celebrated the election in the streets as a great demonstration against the current regime as they saw it as a form of victory, and this was the first time for such a thing after the Islamic Revolution. This movement, described as “Dovvom-e Khordad”, was the third phase of the transformation in Iran, the “back to the core” movement.²⁹ As a result of the economic difficulties caused by the embargo on Iran, it is becoming more and more difficult to control these movements. For this, we see that as a solution, though temporarily, attention is shifting to foreign relations. In this regard, the Mahdi’s functions have begun to be interpreted mostly with the dimension of foreign relations. Besides, the material inherited from Marxism is more Islamized today among both Sunnis and Shiites. The reactions to the occupations of the West in the Islamic world have highlighted the literal religious discourses of the Shiite and Sunni Salafi groups today. This situation makes the use of traditional literature more determinant. Today, the Mahdi narrations have become one of the most important sources on which Sunni and Shia groups are fighting in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

²⁷ *Timeturk*, “İranlı Yetkiliden, ‘Korona’ İtirafı!” (15 March 2020). <https://www.timeturk.com/iranli-yetkiliden-korona-itirafi/haber-1391003>

²⁸ Daryush Shayegan, *Yaralı Bilinç: Geleneksel Toplumlarda Kültürel Şizofreni*, trans. Haydun Bayri, (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2010), 172.

²⁹ Amir Ahmad Fekri, *Tarihsel Gelişim Sürecinde İran Devrimi*, (Mızrak Yayınları, 2011), 202.

References

- Ahışhalı, Mustafa Melih. "Hamaney'in Mehdi'yle İrtibatı Olduğu İddiası". *Anadolu Ajansı AA* (20 May 2016). <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/hamaneyin-mehdiyle-irtibati-oldugu-iddiasi-/575355>
- Cindemir, Kasım. "Ey Müslümanlar Mehdi Geliyor Birleşelim". *Hürriyet* (19 August 2009). <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ey-musulmanlar-mehdi-geliyor-birleselim-12304783>
- Cohen, Ronen A. *İran Hücçetiye Cemiyeti*. Trans. Mehmet Toprak. (İyidüşün Yayınları, 2014).
- Fekri, Amir Ahmad. *Tarihsel Gelişim Sürecinde İran Devrimi*. (Mızrak Yayınları, 2011).
- Fiğlalı, Ethem Ruhi. *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*. (İzmir, 2004).
- Hakyemez, Cemil. "Şia'da Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnanıcı ve Günümüzdeki Yansımaları". *Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnanıcı*, ed. Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, (İstanbul: KURAMER Yayınları, 2017).
- Hakyemez, Cemil. *Şia'da Gaybet İnanıcı ve Gâib On İkinci İmamel-Mehdi*. (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2017).
- Hamaneî, Ayetullah Seyyid Ali. *İmam Mehdi ve Zuhur*. (Tesnim Yayınları, 2015).
- Karar. "İran Tarihinde Bir İlk! Savaş Anlamına Gelen Kırmızı Bayrağı Göndere Çekti" (4 January 2020). <https://www.karar.com/dunya-haberleri/iran-tarihinde-bir-ilk-savas-anlamina-gelen-kirmizi-bayragi-gondere-cekti-1434739>
- Komisyon. İngiliz Şiiliği'nin Perde Arkası ve Uyduruk Merciiyyet. (İstanbul: Önsöz Yayınları, 2017).
- Önalan, Faruk. "Amaç 'Şii Hilali'nden Öte 'Şii Dolunay'". *Sanal Basın* (19 January 2020). <http://www.sanalbasin.com/amac-sii-hilalinden-ote-sii-dolunayi-34257372>
- al-Qummi, Ali ibn Babawayh (al-Shaykh al-Saduq). *Kamal al-din wa tamam al-ni'mah*. (Qum: Dâr al-kutub al-islâmiyya, 1395/1975).
- Roy-Khosrokhavar. *İran: Bir Devrimin Tükenişi*. Trans. İsmail Yergüz. (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2013).
- Safaasya. "İran'dan Hz.Mehdi As Müjdesi Geldi". (Access 15 March 2020) <http://safaasya.blogspot.com.tr/2015/05/irandan-hzmehdi-as-mujdesi-geldi.html>
- Shayegan, Daryush. *Yaralı Bilinç: Geleneksel Toplumlarda Kültürel Şizofreni*. Trans. Haydun Bayri, (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2010).
- Şevket, Doktor Fahreddîn. *Îrân*. ed. Derya Ör. (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 2017).
- Timeturk. "İranlı Yetkiliden, 'Korona' İtirafı!" (15 March 2020). <https://www.timeturk.com/iranli-yetkiliden-korona-itirafi/haber-1391003>
- al-Tûsî, Abu Ja'far. *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*. (Tehran: Dâr al-Kutub al-İslâmiyya, 1365).