

Rupkatha Journal

On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

ISSN 0975-2935

www.rupkatha.com

Volume VII, Number 3, 2015

General Issue

Indexing and abstracting

Rupkatha Journal is an international journal recognized by a number of organizations and institutions. It is archived permanently by www.archive-it.org and indexed by EBSCO, Elsevier, MLA International Directory, Ulrichs Web, DOAJ, Google Scholar and other organizations and included in many university libraries.

SNIP, IPP and SJR Factors

Nr.	Source ID	Title	SNIP 2012	IPP 2012	SJR 2012	SNIP 2013	IPP 2013	SJR 2013	SNIP 2014	IPP 2014	SJR 2014
1	21100201709	Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities	0.313	0.034	0.1	0.271	0.038	0.116	0.061	0.007	0.101

Additional services and information can be found at:

About Us: www.rupkatha.com/about.php

Editorial Board: www.rupkatha.com/editorialboard.php

Archive: www.rupkatha.com/archive.php

Submission Guidelines: www.rupkatha.com/submissionguidelines.php

Call for Papers: www.rupkatha.com/callforpapers.php

This Open Access article is distributed freely online under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). This allows an individual user non-commercial re-use, distribution, sharing and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited with links. For commercial re-use, please contact editor@rupkatha.com.

© AesthetixMS: Aesthetics Media Services



Depiction of Imam Mahdi in Sindhi poetry of Sindh (Pakistan)

Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad, Pakistan

Abstract

This paper discusses the themes that Persian poets introduced in Sindh during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventh centuries and how they were incorporated in Sindhi poetry by Sindhi poets. The main themes during these centuries borrowed from Persian poets were the veneration of Imam Ali and the tragedy of Karbala. These two themes were main topics for Sindhi poets. Secondly, when direct relationships were established in the 18th and 19th centuries with Iran, Persian poets came directly from Iran and introduced another theme of Imam Mahdi in both Sindhi and Persian poetry of Sindh. This theme of Imam Mahdi became a predominant theme for later period poets. I have also described and discussed the names of those who have composed poetry about Imam Mahdi. Lastly, I have also discussed how this theme of Imam Mahdi in Sindhi poetry became agents of change thus converting many to Shai faith.

Keywords: Persian poetry of Sindh, Imam Mahdi, Shai faith

Introduction

Sindh, the southern province of Pakistan, remained under the Persian rule for many centuries. Right from the Achaemenians, Sassanians, Parthians to Nadir Shah's time, Persian art and culture influenced the Sindhi society to a great extent. Much before the foray of Nadir Shah into Sindh, during the Ghaznavid dynasty Persian scholars made its way into Sindh. Later in the Samma period (the rulers of Sindh) (1350-1520), learning the Persian language was greatly valued in Sindh and the Persian scholars acquired higher status in Sindhi society. However, it was during the Soomra period (1055-1350) that the earliest Persian poetry by foreign settlers is traced. The interaction of Sindhi scholars with Persian scholars opened the new vistas in the spheres of poetry and history. The Persian poets also flourished during the reigns of Arghuns (1520-1555), Tarkhans (1555-1590) and the Mughals (1590-1700) rulers of Sindh. However, it was during the reigns of the Kalhoras (1700-1783) and Talpurs (1783-1843) when the Persian poetry attained its height. During these periods, direct relationship was established with the rulers of Iran and many poets came and became the court poets of Sindhi kings. When Nadir Shah invaded India and Sindh, he took along with him three Kalhora princes of Sindh to Mashhad, Iran. During their stay in Iran, they were influenced by Iranian culture and religion. When they came back to Sindh, one of the princes Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro who later on became ruler of Sindh encouraged Persian scholars and fixed stipends for them. Later on, his son Mian Sarfraz became the new king of Sindh. He also encouraged Persian poets and many Persian poets from Isfahan and Shiraz came to become his court poets. Mian Sarfraz was a great Persian poet himself. He composed many *marsia* (elegies), *rubais*, *qasidas* (monody) etc. The Talpur rulers were all followers of the Shia faith. Many rulers were poets of great repute themselves.

The earliest period in the history of Sindh in which some compositions in Persian poetry by the foreign settlers in this province can be traced, is the thirteenth century- the period of the Soomra Kings. Some of these pieces are by Ali bin Hamid Kufi, the well known writer of the *Chach Nama* who arrived and settled in the province of Sindh in 1216 and the rest are by Shaikh Uthman-i-Marwandi, popularly known as Lal Shahbaz. The earliest Persian poets of Sindh, according to extant annals, are the indigenous writers Jam Juna, Shaikh Hammad Jamali, Shaikh Isa Langoti, Jam Nindo all of whom belong to the Samma period (1350-1520) (Laghari 1999; Sadarangani 1987:2).

The rulers of succeeding dynasties of Arghuns and Tarkhans were also men of literary learnings. They opened several schools for the study of Persians and attracted to their court from Persia many poets and scholars like Hashimi Kirmani, Nimatuallah "Wasli", Mulla Asad Qissa-Khwan, Hakim Faghfur-i-Gilani, Mulla Murshid Burujirdi, Talib Amuli and Shayda Isfahani. Later on Sindh was annexed to the Mughal Empire and came to be directly governed by the agents appointed by the Emperor of Delhi. Many Mughal agents or governor too for instance Nawab Amir Khan Abu Nusart Khan, Mir Lutaf Ali Khan etc were poets and patrons of learning. Thatta, the capital of Sindh during the reigns of Sammas, Arghuns, Tarkhans and Mughals, was at its height of its renown and the cradle of Islamic culture and learning. During these periods, one gets the names of Idraki, Beglari and Haji Muhammad Redai who made an original contribution to the Mathnawi form by versifying the native tragedies of *Lila wa Chanesar* and *Ziba wa Nigar* (alias Sasui-wa-Punhun) respectively. Mir Masum Shah "Nami" wrote five Mathnawis in imitation of Nizami's Punj Gunj. He also composed Diwan (Sadarangani 1987:4).

The eighteenth century is the "most barren" period in the Persian poetry in India. There was hardly a poet of eminence during this period, most notable, however, being Shaikh Muhammad Ali "Hazin", Syed Ahmed "Hatif" of Isfahan. During the reign of Prince Aurangzeb, there was a little scope for Persian poetry. Moreover, the emergence of Urdu which had been in the process of development for a long time, gave the death blow to the Persian literature. A few solitary luminaries, however, continued a ray of light in the field of Persian literature in India (Baloch 2004, Sadarangani 1987).

Paradoxically, however, this was the golden age of Persian poetry in the remote, incalculable province of Sindh. During the major part of the eighteenth century Sindh was governed by the Kalhoras (1700-1783), first as a tributary of Mughal Empire in Delhi and then as independent monarchs. In India more and more attention came to be given to Urdu and Persian poetry was almost completely neglected. It is difficult to name even a single great poet in this period (Laghari 1999; Sadarangani 1987; Junejo 1994).

Sindh by this time had passed from the hands of the Kalhoras to the Talpurs (1783-1843). Shia by faith, Talpurs established relationships with the Shah of Persia and many Persian scholars came to Sindh. With the fall of Talpur dynasty and the advent of British (1843-1947) the Persian literature received a setback. However, as a result of strenuous efforts of some old scholars to keep Persian alive in the province, many poems were composed in Persian language.

Persian themes and their Adoption in Sindhi poetry

Many Sindhi poets composed the poetry in their vernacular. The earliest classical literature of Sindhi language has been divided into the following poetic forms:

- Romantic Ballads
- Religious poetry

- Pseudo Romantic ballads
- Epic poetry and
- Customary and ceremonial songs

The forms in which the earlier poets expressed themselves are termed as classical. Makhdum Nuh (1505-1589) of Hala, Shah Karim of Bulri (1537-1628), Pir Muhammad Lakhvi (d.1600), Lutfullah Qadri (1611-1679), Shah Inayat Rizvi (d.1717), Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689-1752), Khawaja Muhammad Zaman of Lunari (1713-1774) were the most renowned poets who composed verses with religious thought manifesting the yearning love of the human soul for divine (Allana 1991).

Prior to direct relationships with Iran in the thirteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries poets either came from India or some from Iran and settled in Sindh. Some became court poets of the Sindhi kings. The themes mainly dealt with love, natural happenings, natural beauty, and romances etc. In the first quarter of eighteenth before Nadir Shah's foray into Sindh Persian poets introduced two more themes, veneration of Hazrat Ali (A.S) and the tragedy of Karbala. This was during the reign of Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro (1719-1753). Two poets during his rule composed Persian *marsia/marthyas*. Therefore, the introduction of Persian *marthiya/marsia* and later its development in Sindh is connected with Kalhoro period. However, Sindhi *marthiya* reached to its pinnacle during the reign of the Talpurs.

Both Allama Muhammad Mui'n alais Makhdum Tharo (1682-1748) and Muhammad Muhsin were among the first *marthiya-gus* of Sindh mentioned by the historians, but it is particularly Muhammad Muhsin, who lived in the old, glorious capital of Sindh, Thatta, with whose name is the Persian *marthiya/marsia* in Sindh is connected (Schimmel 1986; Sandarangrani 1987; Abbas 1984). He composed a great number of *Tarji'band* and particularly *salam*, in which beautiful strong imagery can be perceived:

The boat of Mustafa's family has been drowned in blood,
The black cloud of infidelity has waylaid the sun
The candle of the Prophet was extinguished by the breeze of the Kufans

Muhammad Muhsin was a son of Nur Muhammad and belonged to the family of silk-merchants of Thatta. He was by far the best poet of Thatta and wrote six books in Persian. He received fifteen Rupees from Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro (1719-1753) as a stipend, which though small kept him quite contented (Bhatti 2002:120). In one of his books, *Mihakk-I-Kamal* (the touchstone of perfection), which contained a collection of 13000 verses of different poets with his own 800 verses were dedicated to Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro entitled Quli Khan (Sadarangani 1987:93).

Apart from *marthiya/marsia* he also composed many *mukhammas* (fivesome) in the praise of Hazrat Ali (A.S). Allama Muhammad Mui'n was another Persian poet who composed *marthyas/marsia* and verses in the praise of Hazrat Ali (A.S). He called Hazrat Ali(A.S) in one of his verses as Asadullah, meaning "Lion of God." Later Mir Ali Sher Qaani, a Persian scholar and poet of Kalhoro period developed different form of '*marthiya/ marsia* in question and answer style' (Schimmel 1986).

What is raining? Blood
Who? The eyes
How? Day and Night
Why? From grief

Grief for the king of Karbala

The most interesting tradition along with Persian tradition was the development of *marthiya/marsia* in Sindhi. Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit (1689-1752) was the first to express ideas which were later taken up by other poets. He devoted *sur Kedar* in his *Risalo* (a book of his poetry) to the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet and saw event of Karbala 'as embedded in whole mystical traditions of Islam. He brings his listeners to the moment when no news was heard from the heroes (Schimmel 1986):

The moon of Muharram was seen, anxiety about the princes occurred
What has happened?
Muharram has come back, but the Imams have not come
O princes of Medina, may the Lord bring us together.

In the same *sur* of Kedar, he further describes the sufferings of Imams in the Karbala and puts it in the following words:

In Karbala's plain, Koofans prevented them from drinking water,
The princes then remembered Ali, their noble father,
Coming out of their tents, glancing around, they call Prophet for help.

Shah Bhitai writes that every one mourned on the martyrdom of the Imam Husain. He delineates in his poem that three creatures mourned:

Three types of creatures mourn Hasan and Husain,
People in the homes, beasts in jungle, angles in heaven
Birds in sorrow beat their wings for the loved ones have left,
Lord! may you grant victory to the princes so brave,

Moreover poets raise question that those who do not grieve, will they be forgiven by God in his another poem:

Those whose hearts grieve not for Hasan and Husain Imam,
Can they be forgiven by Almighty, the lord of all.

Shah Abdul Latif's interpretation of the fate of the Imam Husain as a model of suffering love and thus as a model of the mystical path, is a deeply impressive piece of literature. It was never surpassed, although in his succession a number of poets composed elegies on Karbala. The most famous of them is Sabit Ali Shah (1740-1810) whose speciality was the poetic genre of *suwari*, the poem addressed to the rider Husain, who once as child had ridden on the Prophet's back and then was riding bravely into the battlefield (Schimmel 1986). This genre was developed by Syed Sabit Ali Shah who was the court poet of Mian Sarfaraz Khan Kalhoro and later became a court poet of Mir Karam Ali Talpur. This genre, as well as the more common forms, persists in Sindhi throughout the whole 18th and 19th centuries and even in British and contemporary times (Sachal Sarmast, Bedil Rohriwaro, Mir Hasan, Shah Nasir, Mirza Budhal Beg, Mirza Qalich Beg, to mention a few, some of whom were Sunni sufis).

The *suwari* theme was lovingly elaborated by poet Mir Abdul Hasan Sangi, to whom Sindhi owes some very fine and touching songs in the honour of prince martyrs, and who strongly emphasizes the mystical aspects of the event of Karbala, Husain is here put in the relation with the Prophet (Schimmel 1986).

The prince has made his *miraj* on the ground of Karbala,
The Shah's horse has gained the rank of Buraq.

Death brings the Imam Husain, who was riding on Zuljinah, into the divine presence as much as the winged Buraq brought the Prophet into the immediate divine presence during his night journey and ascent into heaven (Schimmel 1986).

There is another genre *munaqiba* in which *Panjtan* (Muhammad, Ali Fatima, Hasan and Husian) are praised interestingly enough, their *munaqiba* come from Sunni author Pandhi Arisar. Apart from Pandhi Arisar, many *munaqiba* both by Sunnis and Shias were written for Ali ibn Abi Talib, almost all of them praise his incomparable bravery (Schimmel 1986: 214).

The depiction of Imam Mahdi in Sindhi poetry

King Nadir Shah invaded India and Sindh in 1739 thus annexing Sindh to his empire. Sindh came under the rule of the Persian monarch. Nadir Shah took three sons of Mian Noor Muhammad, the king of Sindh, as hostage to Mashhad, Iran. His sons, who were taken to Iran, were Mian Ghulam Shah, Mian Muradyab, and Mian Atur Khan (Beg 1980:27). Later Mian Noor Muhammad sent his generals Jam Nindo, and Shaikh Ghulam Muhammad, Khairo and his court poets Muhammad Muhsin, Shia by faith, to look after his sons in Iran (Mahar 1996:406).

It is believed that Muhammad Muhsin after coming back from Iran, introduced another theme of Imam Mahdi which was hitherto unknown in Persian and Sindhi poetry of Sindh. There is another school of thought that argues that it was introduced by Persian poets from Iran who accompanied Nadir and some settled in Sindh. But there is no documented proof of it that it was introduced by Persian poets of Iran. Some Sindhi scholars believe that it was first time introduced by Mian Sarfaraz Khan Kalhoro (1772-1776) son of Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro who composed Rubais on Imam Mahdi (Beg 1980:79) . But based on the documented proof, one can safely argue that the theme of Imam Mahdi was first introduced by Muhammad Muhsin. He wrote five Persian books and one Diwan. One of his books *Tiraz-i-Danish* (Royal robe of knowledge), a mathnavi which commemorates the birth of Imam Mahdi (Sadarangani 1986:92). But unfortunately his book is not available in any library of Pakistan to cite his work on Imam Mahdi.

Mian Sarfaraz Khan Kalhoro as mentioned above was son of Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro. Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro had married a daughter of Ali Raza Isfahani in Iran when he was living as hostage at the court of Nadir Shah. When Nadir Shah was killed in 1748, Mian Ghulam Shah came back to Sindh along with his Iranian wife. She bore him illustrious son Mian Sarfaraz. Mian Ghulam Shah (1757-1772) had also a great Iranian Influence. When he became king of Sindh, he installed *alams* in every important shrine in Sindh. However, the more prominent *alam* was installed in the shrine of Lal Shabaz Qalander (Beg 1980:126). When he constructed the Pucca fort of Hyderabad, he engraved the names of holy prophet and all Imams with clearly the name of Imam Mahdi on the stone slab of the main gate of the fort (Beg 1980:122) This reflected his reverence and devotion to all the Imams. Many Iranians became his ministers and court poets. Likewise, when Mian Sarfaraz Khan (1772-1776) became the ruler of Sindh, he also encouraged many Iranian scholars and poets at his court. He was greatly impressed by Iranian culture. In one of his poems, he mentioned that the people of Isfahan could only understand and value his poetry:

The people of Sindh do not know the worth of your poetry, Sarfaraz!
Take it to Isfahan where it would be duly acknowledged.

He was a very good poet and composed his poetry in Persian. He composed *marsiya*, *Rubais*, *ghazals*, *munajat* and *madah* in Persian language. When he was dethroned and imprisoned in 1776, he composed many *Rubais* (quatrains) on Imam Mahdi in the prison. In one

of his Rubais, he called upon for the help of the Imam Mahdi against the cruelty and injustice through which the world, of which he is also part, is passing.

My lord, my beloved, My Imam Mahdi, my majesty,
How long I bear this injustice, violence and cruelty
From the injustice, the cruelty and violence of Kings and their governors
I am standing at your door seeking your help against them.

His son Mir Muhammad Kalhoro also composed *Rubais* on Imam Mahdi. This theme was later on taken up by a number of Sindhi poets. Sindhi poets composed poetry on Imam Mahdi by focusing on four themes 1) Birth 2) *Zahoor* (appearance), 3) help/assistance 4) *Salam* (Salutation).

The first Sindhi poet who composed poetry on Imam Mahdi was Syed Sabit Ali Shah. He first served as the court poet of Mian Sarfaraz Kalhoro and later on Mir Karm Ali Talpur. He introduced two poetic genres in Sindhi, *manqabat* and *Salam*. In the former praiseworthy verses were composed on Imam Mahdi and in the latter, Imam Mahdi was saluted in the *Salam* genre. The poetry of Syed Sabit Ali Shah served as a springboard for several other poets who composed poetry on Imam Mahdi. In one of his poems, Syed Sabit Ali Shah salutes and praises Imam Mahdi:

Welcome! The follower of Prophet Muhammad's path,
You have the qualities of Ali
You have the beauty of Hasan
You are the custodian of Husain, the martyr of Karbala
Welcome! Hazrat Imam Mahdi Welcome.

Many other poets of Kalhoro period namely Mirza Murad Ali Beg composed poems on Imam Mahdi making salutations to him in his poetry. Murad Ali Beg lived during the reigns of Kalhoras and Talpurs. He died in 1837 (Beg 1984:18). However, in the 19th century during the Talpur rule, there was a tremendous poetry composed on Imam Mahdi. The Talpurs were Shia by faith; therefore, they encouraged the poets to compose poetry on the Imam Mahdi. One finds the names of several important poets who commemorated the birth of Imam Mahdi in their poetry. A Talpur period poet Mira Hamid Ali Beg is overjoyed on the birth of the beloved Imam Mahdi which he expresses in the following piece:

In the mid of Month of Sha'ban (15th) Sahib Zaman was born
His majesty Imam Mahdi was born
The light spread in the whole universe
Imam Mahdi was born.

Another poet of the same period composed poetry on the birth of Imam Mahdi and says that:

It is eid on 15th Sha'ban at the home of every *Momin*
Because Imam Mahdi was born on this auspicious day

One finds a large number of poems being composed by Talpur period poets. Even in the British period (1843-1947), one finds several poets composing poetry on Imam Mahdi. One of very famous poets of this period was Mir Abdul Hussain Sangi (1852-1924). He composed poems on the birth, and *zahoor* (appearance), and made *Salam* (salutations) to Imam Mahdi in his poetry. In one of his poems, Sangi says:

My wish is to prostrate to the place/Muqam

Where Imam Mahdi appears
And then live in Medina!
Where tranquility prevails

After the fall of Talpur dynasty at the hands of the British, the poets continued to compose poetry on Imam Mahdi. In this period, there were also many Sindhi poets who wrote poetry on Imam Mahdi. One such poet was Mirza Qurban Ali Beg (1887-1923) who says:

You are my Imam Ya Mahdi
I am your slave Ya Mahdi
Fulfill my wish
My wish is to make salutations (salams) to you Ya Mahdi

The father of Qurban Ali Beg, Mirza Qasim Ali Beg (1837-1904) was also a very famous poet who also composed poetry on Imam Mahdi. In one of his poems, he requested to God, the lord of all, please make the appearance of Imam Mahdi soon so that he may rid the world of cruelty and restore peace :

Oh my lord, make the appearance of Imam Mahdi soon
This is the prayer of everyone day and night
So that cruelty is removed and justice is restored in the world
The plea is of everyone everywhere in the world day and night.

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

In one of the following verses Imam Ali Beg calls upon Imam Mahdi for help:

My Lord Hazrat Sahib al Zaman help me
Listen to the plea of the helpless
My majesty Imam Mahdi help me
My condition is not hidden from you

Imam Ali Beg lived in the old capital of Sindh Hyderabad . After the British conquest of Sindh, Hyderabad remained the centre of the Shia poets. He composed *Salam* (salutation), *marthiya/marsiya* and *qasida*. Apart from Imam Ali Beg (Laghari 1999:107), there was another his contemporary poet Syed Ghulam Hyder Shah (1898-1957). He was born in Thatta and served the Talpurs of Khairpur Mirs (Beg 1984:36). He composed poems on *marsiya*, *salam* and *manqabat*. In one of his poems, he expresses that how his and other Momins' (a term used for Shias) wishes were fulfilled by Imam Mahdi:

Lord of all, made the 15 Sha'ban the auspicious day
Offering missed prayers (qazai umari) night passed
Before the crack of the dawn Momins wrote Areezon (pleas)
And everyone is elated that their wishes were fulfilled

Some of the members of the Talpur dynasty also composed poetry about Imam Mahdi. Mir Hasan Ali Khan Talpur (1824-1907, who was a son of the last ruler of Sindh Mir Naseer Khan Talpur was born in the Hyderabad in 1824. When the British supplanted the Talpur dynasty, Mir

Hasan Ali Khan Talpur was arrested along with his father and was confined to Calcutta jail in India. It is believed that during his confinement, he composed many *marsiya*(elegies) and *manqabat*. In one of his verses/*manqabat*, he called upon the Imam Mahdi to help him:

O light of the lord help me
 O knower of the secrets helps me
 O lord of the sufis help me
 You await to the call of Lord
 O last Imam, Imam Mahdi help me

Mir Hasan Ali Khan was poet of great repute. He died in the Calcutta jail and later on his body was taken to Karbala for burial (Beg 1984:24). Besides, many other Sindhi poets continued to compose poetry in the Talpur and British periods. It still continues. The contemporary poets who compose poetry on Imam Mahdi are several- namely Mirza Kazim Ali Beg, Mir Abbas Ali Beg, Mirza Fateh Ali Beg “Shahid” and Mirza Sikander Ali Beg. The name of Janan Faqir Chan (d.1997), a sufi poet, is also prominent. His poetry book (Haq Isbat is full of verses on Imam Mahdi. One of his poems is rendered in the mystical style:

Followers of Imam Mahdi!
 Mendicants with their heads uncovered
 Wandered in the wilderness
 Seeking for the master

Followers of Imam Mahdi
 Uncontrolled are ascetics
 They moved in loincloth everywhere
 On the path of devotion!
 They came across the troubles,

Followers of Imam Mahdi
 They found the master
 Their path then they followed
 Master appeared on the 15th Sha’ban, the auspicious day

Perfect guide they found,
 Perfect Imam Mahdi they found,
 Smashed were doubts!
 Now the mendicants are with their heads covered.

There is another beautiful two line verse by Janan faqir Chan on Imam Mahdi in which he expresses his condition in the following lines:

I was unclean, became clean with the blessings of Imam Mahdi
 When my Majesty Imam Mahdi showed me the right path to follow.

Conclusion

The theme of Imam Mahdi in Sindhi poetry was recurrent and it became an agent of change converting many people to the Shia sect. This took place mainly during the Talpur period when they promoted the *musha’ira* (poetry competition) culture where the ordinary people came and

listened to the eminent poets composing poetry on the tragedy of Karbala, the bravery of Hazrat Ali (A.S) and Imam Mahdi. The population found a solace in the poetry on these themes. There was a growing interest of the ordinary people to attend the poetry competition (musha'ira). At first, this was confined to the four cities with a considerable Shia inhabitants which were Hyderabad, Sehwan, Rohri and Khairpur. The Talpur rulers promoted and encouraged the poets to compose poetry on the Imams. Later on, other centres sprang up in the other towns and cities and even in the villages. One also finds a lot of mention of Imam Mahdi in the folk poetry of rural Sindh which unfortunately has not yet been documented. This folk poetry mostly takes place in the *maqans*. The word *maqan* in Sindhi language is referred to a sacred space with *alam* (Flag of Hazrat Abbas) in the centre of the *maqan*. At these *maqans* in the rural Sindh people mostly of Shia faith hold gatherings and folk poets meet there to compose poetry not only about *Panjtan* (the Holy Prophet Muhammad, Ali, Hasan, Husain and Fatima) but also on Imam Mahdi. Apart from their own folk poetry, they also recite the poetry of the eminent Sindhi poets.

It is indispensable to note that the poetry on Imam Mahdi started in the Kalhora period (1700-1783) and reached its pinnacle or height during the Talpur period (1783-1843). The poets also continued to produce poetry on Imam Mahdi in the British period. And more importantly, it continues in the contemporary period. We also need to document folk poetry of rural Sindh which is very simple and reflects their love and devotion to Imam Mahdi. If one happens to visit the cities of Sindh, one notices the fast growing devotion and love of rural population not only to Hazrat Ali (A.S) and his progeny but also to Imam Mahdi. If one visits the towns of Jhangara and Bajara, lying 20 km west of Sehwan City, the landscapes of towns are dotted with *alams* which is not an old development. It's the recent phenomena that are taking place and reflects people's devotion and love to Hazrat Ali (A.S) his progeny and Imam Mahdi.

Apart from folk poetry, urban centres in the cities of Sindh also play a very important role in keeping the religious poetry alive. Some of the families especially the Mirza family of Hyderabad and the Rizvi and Mousavi families of Rohri plays significant roles in keeping alive the religious poetry.

References

- Allana, Ghulam Ali. 1991. *An introduction to Sindhi Literature*. Jamshoro: Sindhi Adabi Board.
- Beg, Mirza Abbas Ali. 1984. *Kulyat Syed Sabit Ali Shah*. Karachi: Islamic culture and Research Centre.
- Beg, Mirza Abbas Ali Beg. 1980. *Khudayar Khani Mian Sarfaraz Khan Abbasi*. Jamshoro: Institute of Sindhology.
- Baloch, N.A. 2009. *North-West Frontiers of Pakistan and other Avenues of Historical Writings*. Jamshoro: Pakistan Study centre, University of Sindh.
- Baloch, N.A. 2004. *Sindh: Studies Historical*. Jamshoro: Pakistan Study Centre, University of Sindh.
- Bhatti Rashid. 2002. *Birth of Great Poet (Kalhora period, 1700-184)*. Jamshoro: Institute of Sindhology, University of Sindh.
- Khamisani, Amena. 2003. *The Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai*. Hyderabad: Bhit Shah Cultural Centre Committee.
- Junejo, Abdul Jabbar. 1994. *Sindhi Adab Ji Makhtasar Tarikh (A short History of Sindhi Literature)*. Kandiaro: Roshni Publications.
- Lambrick, H.T. *Sindh, before the Muslim Conquest II*. 2nd ed. Jamshoro: Sindhi Adabi Board.

- Lari, Suhail Zaheer. 1994. *A history of Sindh*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Sadarangani, H.I. 1987. *Persian Poets of Sindh*. Jamshoro: Sindhi Adabi Board.
- Laghari, Abdul Jabbar. 1999. *Sindhi Shairi Ji Makhtasar Tarikh (A Short history of Sindh Poetry)*. Shikarpur: Mehran Academy.
- Mahar, Ghulam Rasool. 1996. *Tarikh-i-Sindh:Kalhora Daur I &II (History of Sindh: Kalhora Period)*. Karachi Culture and Tourism department, Sindh.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. 2004. *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art, Culture*. London:Peaktion Books.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. 1986. "Karbala and the Imam Husayn in Persian and Indo-Muslim Literature" In *Al-Serat Vol XII*, Harvard University.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. 1986. *Pearls From The Indus:Studies in Sindhi Culture*. Jamshoro:Sindhi Adabi Board.

The author is a Research Anthropologist at Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad, Pakistan.
