



## Criticism of Riffat Hassan's Theory of "Incompatibility of Shiite Mahdism with Qur'anic Verses"

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### **Abstract**

Riffat Hassan, a Pakistani-American thinker, is a Muslim open-minded and leader of the Islamic feminist movement, who criticizes Shiite Mahdism through Qur'anic verses in several parts: the fundamental concepts and elements of Messianism, Imamate and hence Imam Mahdi (AS) in Shi'a, and psychological reasons for the tendency of Muslims to the Savior and Messianism. The present research critically examines the theory of Riffat Hassan in these cases and proves the compatibility of Mahdism with the Qur'anic verses. Therefore, elements of Shiite Mahdism, the Imamate, and the existence of the promised Mahdi (AS) are rooted in Qur'anic verses and hadiths, so the secularism or backwardness of Muslims are not because of the belief of Mahdism or seeking refuge in the Savior.

**Keywords:** Riffat Hassan; Qur'an; Messianism; Mahdism; Savior

### **Introduction**

Messianism includes principles, expectations of apocalyptic events, negative attitudes towards the present, and hopes for fundamental better changes in the future (Hassan, 1985, p. 262), which is of great importance to Christianity and Judaism, but according to Riffat Hassan<sup>1</sup>, Islam is not a Messianic religion and the Savior has no role in this religion (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1976, p. 1077).

Messianism (belief in a promised savior) is one of Shia's fundamental beliefs (Hassan, 1985, p. 262), which is examined by Riffat Hassan in several parts in the light of the Qur'anic verses: Critique of the fundamental concepts and elements of Messianism, critique of the Imamate and hence Imam Mahdi

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(AS) in Shi'a, and psychological reasons for the tendency of Muslims to the Savior and Messianism (Hassan, 1985, p. 262).

Riffat Hassan concludes that the Qur'an opposes to Messianism and then believes that Shi'as are not Muslims (Hassan, 1985, p. 268). Therefore, the belief in the Shiite Messianism, which is opposed to the Qur'an, leads to the revert (*irtidād*) of Islam and getting out of Islamic community.

According to Riffat Hassan, as Muslims differ widely in the way of deducing legal commands (*aḥkām*) and issues, but they all agree on the authenticity of the Qur'an and its absolute correctness, his focus will be on the Qur'an itself, not hadiths, for many hadiths are fabricated and not true (Hassan, 1985, p. 262).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the method of Riffat Hassan in presenting his theory is based only on Qur'anic verses.

In the present study, applying the Qur'anic verses, i.e. Riffat Hassan's own method, his theory in this issue is examined and criticized and in some cases Shiite hadiths are considered for further explain.

The incompatibility of the pillars and elements of Messianism with the Qur'anic verses

As showed above, Riffat Hassan states that Messianism is of fundamental importance in the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, but is not compatible with Islamic beliefs according to the Qur'anic verses. As such, the main concepts and elements of Messianism, i.e. the Savior, the atonement or ransom of sins, Intercession (*shafā'ah*) and Utopia are rejected by the Qur'anic verses and are incompatible with them (Hassan, 1985, p. 263), which are discussed by Riffat Hassan here in details:

### **Inconsistency of the concept of Shiite expectation with Qur'anic verses**

In the religions of Judaism and Christianity, Christ or Savior is tied to the concept of waiting (in Judaism) or returning (in Christianity). In Judaism, however, the emphasis is on the historical role of Christ (Savior) and in Christianity on his role in the apocalypse and the end of the world so that his return leads to their worldly and Hereafter prosperity (Hassan, 1985, p. 263). Shiite hadiths also emphasize extensively on the patience and expectance of Reappearance of Mahdi (AS) in the Occultation (time of absence), so that it is considered as one of the best practices (Nu'mānī, 1397 HS, p. 200).

According to Riffat Hassan, the concept of awaiting and living for the age of Messianism and the reappearance of the Savior has no place in the Qur'an. In other words, for the Qur'an, current human actions and deeds determine his ultimate destiny, but in the sense of awaiting, life is meant towards the coming time and in the apocalypse (Hassan, 1985, p. 263). For example, some of the Qur'anic verses are as follow: "That man can have nothing but what he strives for" (Najm: 39), "Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds" (Muddaththir: 38), "Whoever works righteousness benefits his own soul; whoever works evil, it is against his own soul" (Fuṣṣilat: 46).

It should be noted that the word Christ in the Qur'an with Jesus (Al-Imran: 45; Nisa': 157 and 171) and without it (Ma'dah: 19, 75 and 78; Tawbah: 30-31) refers to Jesus Christ (AS), which its literal root is "*m-s-h*" in the meaning of "to purify filth by hand (William Lane, 1863, vol. 7, p. 2713), because Jesus healed the sick by touching them (Hassan, 1985, p.263). In the Arabic language, Christ is also referred to someone who has traveled a lot and is a traveler (William Lane, 1863, vol. 7, p. 2713). It corresponds to the person of Jesus Christ as well, for he also traveled a lot (Hassan, 1985, p. 263).

<sup>2</sup>. In many of his writings Riffat Hassan rejects all Islamic Hadiths, in both Shi'a and Sunni. According to Shiite thought and principles, hadiths' chain of transmitters (*sanad*) and text (*matn*) must be exactly examined in order to find which one is correct and which one is not. One of the most important criteria of the credibility of hadiths is their compatibility with the Qur'an.

Accordingly, Christ is a proper name in the Qur'an and is not attributed to the atonement, intercession, or ruling over the alive and the dead. In contrast to Christianity, Jesus defends himself and his mother against the charge of deity and being God (Ma'idah: 116-117) (Hassan, 1985, p. 264). So in the Qur'an, Christ has no relation to Messianism and waiting for his appearance at the end of time. Therefore, one of the most fundamental elements of Messianism has no Qur'anic root, but rather is incompatible with it.

### **Critique of Inconsistency of the concept of Shiite expectation with Qur'anic verses**

The consequence of Hassan's criticism of Shiite Mahdism in this part was that according to the Qur'an, current human actions and deeds determine his ultimate destiny and so waiting for the future doesn't make sense. To criticize this view, it should be stated that Shi'ite expectation does not contradict the Qur'anic verses argued by Riffat Hassan, for waiting does not mean giving up and not doing acts of worship. For this reason, in some Shi'ite hadiths, some deeds like piety alongside waiting are known as the best during Occultation (Nu'mānī, 1397 HS, p. 194). Because the pious person is also the one who, by faith and good deeds, provides for himself a good mood and feature to protect him from self-passions.

In Shiite hadiths it is strongly emphasized on being careful of acts and so Riffat Hassan's interpretation is rejected:

“لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ لَمْ يُحَاسِبْ نَفْسَهُ فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ فَإِنْ عَمِلَ حَسَنًا اسْتَرَادَ اللَّهَ وَإِنْ عَمِلَ سَيِّئًا اسْتَغْفَرَ اللَّهَ مِنْهُ وَ تَابَ إِلَيْهِ”:

“Whoever does not account himself every day is not among us, so that if he practiced good, should increase it and if he did a bad action, should repent to Allah and ask for His forgiveness” (Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 2, p. 453).

Because accounting actions means doing good actions and not doing bad things. As a result, expectation does not contradict the verses argued in this part and Riffat Hassan's criticism of Shiite beliefs is incorrect. Moreover, in Shiite culture, waiting does not mean giving up, but doing good acts and deeds.

### **The incompatibility of atonement or ransom of sins with the Qur'an**

One of the basic concepts of the Bible is the return of the Savior in order to provide forgiveness and atonement of human sins. However, there is a fundamental difference between the views of two religions (Hassan, 1985, p. 264); In Judaism, in general, it will happen for everyone in the tangible world at a period of history. In Christianity, in contrary, the atonement of sins occurs in a spiritual and intangible realm, that is, in the soul and in the personal world (Gershom, 1971, p. 1). For in the Torah there is a special atonement for forgiveness of a particular sin, but in the Bible, Jesus Christ is the atonement for all human sins: “The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all our sins” (John, 1: 7). “Christ Himself is the atonement for our sins, not only our sins, but the sins of all the people of the world” (*Ibid*, 2: 2).

Islam rejects the redemption of sins in general, i.e. in the Jewish and Christian concept: “We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; He was indeed unjust and foolish” (Ahzab: 72). According to this verse, man has willingly accepted “Trust” which means living with such responsibility (Hassan, 1985, p. 265).

The Qur'an accepts man's attempt to choose good or evil (*ibid*): “We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful” (Insan: 3). Man is a free creature who determines his ultimate destiny. Thus, there is no intermediary between man and God. Although the Qur'an regards Jesus (AS) as the Spirit of God, he opposes the concept of regarding him as the atonement of sins or the infallible leader

of the Church (as Christians believe), principles require the inadequacy of human personality, tendency to create a sense of dependency and thus impede human moral promotion (Iqbal, 1964, p. 38).

Thus the responsibility and free will of man is one of the fundamental themes of the Qur'an: "Every soul draws the meed of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burdens can bear of burdens can bear the burden of another" ('An'am: 164); "Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds" (Muddaththir: 38) (Hassan, 1985, p. 265). Man has free will to live righteously and fairly (Ralunan, 1980, p. 18) and God is his helper. As a result, predetermined will or determinism is invalid in the Qur'anic view (Bausani, 1954, v. 3, p. 172): "Because Allah will never change the grace which He hath bestowed on a people until they change what is in their (own) souls". ('An'am: 53), which is explicitly referred to man's choice of his destiny (Hassan, 1985, p. 266).

Consequently, another essential element of Messianism, i.e. the atonement of sins by the Savior, is rejected by the Qur'an. Because human free will means human responsibility for one's actions and deeds and no one else is able to eliminate his/her sins.

### **Study of the incompatibility of atonement or ransom of sins with the Qur'an**

As showed above, the concept of the Savior's being as the atonement of sins is one of the tenets of Christianity, according to which Christ was crucified in order to clean the sins of people. But such a theory has no basis in Shi'a and none of the Shiite hadiths and sayings say such a thing about Imam Mahdi (AS), the promised. It is testified that in the accounts concerning the period of his reign and the events after his martyrdom (Mufid, 1413 AH, p. 257), there is no mention of his becoming as the redemption of the sins of others.

It should be noted that in Shi'a jurisprudence, atonement is used only for certain legal matters and for committing some sins, such as breaking the fasting deliberately during the month of Ramadan, which are not connected to the Reappearance of Imam Mahdi (AS), the Qā'im, and his martyrdom. As a result, this critique of Riffat Hassan has nothing to do with Shi'ite principles and foundations about Mahdism, and is due to the lack of pondering and searching for authentic Shiite sources.

### **Incompatibility of Intercession with the Qur'anic verses**

Another element of Messianism in Judaism and Christianity is intercession (*shafā'ah*) (Hassan, 1985, p. 266), as such the Savior is a mediator between God and men and so their sins are forgiven: "Jesus Christ is the one who died and was even raised again and now intercedes with us in the right hand of God" (Romans, 8:34), "And therefore he [Christ] is able to save all them who come into the presence of God through him completely and forever, because he [Jesus] liveth forever, and intercedes for them" (Hebrews, 7:25), "My children, I write this unto you, that ye sin not; but if any man commit a sin, there is in the presence of God the Father the one who intercedes for us, even Jesus Christ, who is perfectly good" (John, 2: 1). Also, one of the attributes of the Shiite Imams is to intercede for their Shi'as (Ibn Babiwayh, 1378 HS, vol. 2, p. 277), so the Savior and the twelfth Imam has also such features.

In contrast, the Qur'an generally opposes the principle of intercession and rejects its occurrence (Hassan, 1985, p. 266): "Then guard yourselves against a Day when one soul shall not avail another, nor shall compensation be accepted from her nor shall intercession profit her nor shall anyone be helped (from outside)" (Baqarah: 123).

Accordingly, intercession is contrary to Qur'anic principles. For the Qur'an does not require more than one person's ability as such his ability would be ignored through the intercession of someone else: "On no soul doth Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it

suffers every ill that it earns” (Baqarah: 286), “no burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear” (‘An’am: 152). In addition, the mercy of God includes all things: “but My mercy extendeth to all things” (‘Araf: 156), “Our Lord! Thy embracest all things, in Mercy and Knowledge” (Ghafir: 7) (Rahman, 1980, p. 31). Therefore, in the divine mercy, there is no need to other’s intercession and intermediation. God blesses all beings without a mediator. As a result, according to Riffat Hassan, for this principle of Messianism there is no Qur’anic basis, as well.

### **Critique of the incompatibility of intercession with Qur’anic verses**

The Qur’anic verses on intercession are divided into four general categories: verses that completely deny intercession on the Day of Judgment (Baqarah: 254), verses that deny the usefulness of intercession for criminals and recognize its principle as partial possibility (Baqarah: 48), verses that deny guardianship and intercession except the Glorified God (Sajdah: 4), and verses that consider others’ intercession only through divine permission and consent (Baqarah: 255) and (‘Anbiya’: 28) (Javadi Amoli, 1388 HS, v. 7, p. 336-337). The verses cited by Riffat Hassan on the rejection of intercession in the Qur’an are related to the first verses. Hence, he neglects the other three categories of Qur’anic verses about intercession and puts himself in an incomplete induction.

The first verses, namely those cited by Riffat, deny the occurrence of intercession in the Resurrection, which, according to Sadr al-Muti’alīhīn, is due to the lack of talent and power in the Hereafter and the attainment of all human beings (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1981, v. 6, p. 1-6). Some exegetes see the reason behind this issue that everyone is preoccupied with their deeds and overwhelmed by fear (Razi, ۱۴۲۰ AH, v. ۳, p. ۵۳۱).

The reason for the intercession of the Imams and the Twelfth Imam (AS) is as follows: The Prophets and, above all, the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and the Imams (AS), due to their nominal integrity (name of Allah), mediate the receiving of human grace from God to people and so are effective in exiting them from potentiality to action and from incompetency to perfection. For this reason, it is stated in the Qur’an: “Say: ‘If ye do love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful’” (‘Ali ‘Imran: 31). Therefore, anyone who is related to such intermediaries, such as following the religious commandments, obeying them, and so on, is subject to intercession (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1366, v. 4, p. 124-125). With this in mind, the Qur’an accepts the principle of intercession and the denying verses are related to the Resurrection, not the absolute absence of intercession.

As a result, Riffat Hassan's criticism of one of the most important pillars of Mahdism and its existence towards the Twelfth Imam (AS) is incorrect.

### **Incompatibility of the Savior with the Qur’anic verses**

The most prominent element of Messianism is the Savior himself, who has a long age: All Christians believe that Jesus Christ “will return to the living and the dead in order to judge them” (Matthew, 25: 31-46; Revelation, 20: 11-15). Jesus not only foretold His death and resurrection (Matthew 16: 27 and 25: 31; Mark 8: 31-32, 9: 9-10 and 10: 33-43), but also foretold His return (Matthew, 16: 27 and 25: 31; Mark, 8: 38 and 13: 26). After the Resurrection of the dead, Jesus will stay on the earth for forty days, giving the disciples strength (Acts, 1: 3). When the disciples observed him ascend to heaven, they were told that he would return as he ascended to heaven (Luke, 24: 51; Acts, 1: 9-11). From the beginning, the apostles taught the believers to await the return of Christ (Acts, 3: 19-21; Titus, 2: 13; Hebrews, 9: 28).

In the Shiite teachings, the Savior is also the most important element of Mahdism, who will appear after a long and frustrating period:

”وَاللَّهِ لَيَغِيْبَنَّ إِمَامَكُمْ سِنِينَ مِنْ دَهْرِكُمْ وَ لَتَمَحْضَنَّ حَتَّى يُقَالَ مَاتَ قَتِيلَ هَذَا بِأَيِّ وَادٍ سَلَكَ“:

“be aware! By God, your Imam is absent for a period of your days, you are subjected to such severe tests that you say: He is dead, killed, destroyed, in which valley?! (That is, you are certain of the death of Imam Zaman) (Kulaynī, 1407 AH, v. 1, p. 336).

According to Riffat Hassan, a person with supernatural features is incompatible with the Qur’an (Rahman, 1980, p. 89), because all the prophets, including the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), were human beings whose actions were human like eating and sleeping and lived and died like human: “Say: ‘Why then have ye slain the prophets of Allah?’” (Baqarah: 31). “They will do you no harm, barring a trifling annoyance; if they come out to fight you, they will show you their backs, and no help shall they get” (‘Ali ‘Imran: 111), “and (their act) of slaying the prophets in defiance of right” (‘Ali ‘Imran: 181), “We did send messengers before thee, and appointed for them wives and children” (Ra’d: 38), “Their messengers said to them: ‘True, we are human like yourselves’” (Ibrahim: 11). Indeed, the Qur’an does not attribute superhuman characteristics to the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), but emphasizes that he was not an angel, did not possess the treasure and had no knowledge of the future: “Say: ‘I tell you not that with me are the Treasures of Allah, nor do I know what is hidden, nor do I tell you I am an angel. I but follow what is revealed to me’” (‘An’am: 50), “Say: ‘I have no power over any good or harm to myself except as Allah willeth. If I had knowledge of the unseen, I should have multiplied all good, and no evil should have touched me: I am but a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to those who have faith’” (‘A’raf: 188), “Such are some of the stories of the Unseen, which We have revealed unto thee: before this, neither thou nor thy People knew them. So persevere patiently: for the End is for those who are righteous” (Hud: 49), “Say: ‘I know not whether the (Punishment) which ye are promised is near, or whether my Lord will appoint for it a distant term’” (Jinn: 25) (Hassan, 1985, p. 266).

Although the Qur’an considers Muhammad (PBUH) a person of great moral character (Qalam: 4) and identifies him as a human example (‘Ahzab: 21), he suffered like other prophets, as well. The Qur’an expresses Muhammad’s human attributes in many ways; For instance: advising him to be calm when his enemies opposed to his message (Ma’idah: 41), blaming him for being ignorant of a blind old man (‘Abas: 1-2), and even threatening him that “If it were Our Will, We could take away that which We have sent thee by inspiration: then wouldst thou find none to plead thy affair in that matter as against Us” (Bani ‘Isra’iil: 86) (Hassan, 1985, p. 266-267).

Muhammad himself is in charge of his actions (Nisa’: 84) and is unable to guide anyone whom he wishes (Qisas: 56). He will also be tormented if he does not obey the command of God: “Say: ‘I would, if I disobeyed my Lord, indeed have fear of the Chastisement of a Mighty Day’” (‘An’am: 15) (Hassan, 1985, p. 267).

The result is that the main characteristics of the Savior, i.e. long life and superhuman traits, are incompatible with the Qur’anic verses and the Qur’an opposes them. Because the Prophet himself is a human like others. Therefore, the existence of the Promised Mahdi (AS) and his special attributes such as long life contradict many Qur’anic verses.

### **Critique of the Savior's incompatibility with the Qur’anic verses**

As for the Savior in the Qur’an, two points are worth mentioning here: the possibility of a long life for man; for instance, Prophet Noah (AS) is introduced as a person with a long and unusual life: “We did send Noah to his people, and he tarried among them a thousand years less fifty” (‘Ankabut: 14). Therefore, to suppose a long age for the Promised Mahdi (AS) is also possible. Another point is about superhuman traits of the Savior, which are also proved by the Qur’anic verses: “Say: ‘I am but a man like

yourselves, (but) the inspiration has come to me” (Kahf: 110) The first part of this verse proves that the Prophet (PBUH), like other human beings, was a human being (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1360 HS, p. 143) and belonged to the worldly place (*Ibid*, p. 144). That’s why this phrase is interpreted in Shi’ite traditions as the ordinary affairs of life, such as marriage (Kulaynī, 1407 AH, v. 5, p. 569). The second part of the verse, i.e. revelation, expresses the Prophet’s truth and his superiority over other human beings. In other words, revelation is something which distinguishes the holy Prophet (PBUH) from other human beings, for it does not belong to most people. Hence, the Qur’anic verses prove both human and divine level for the Prophet (PBUH), denying the theory of Riffat Hassan regarding the rejection of superhuman attributes in the Qur’an.

In Shi’ite hadiths, in addition to emphasis on the divine attributes of the infallible Imams (AS) and therefore the Twelfth Imam (AS), such as “We are rulers/masters to do God’s affairs, we are the treasury of His knowledge and the place of His revelation (*Ibid*, v. 1, p. 192). Their human attributes are also confirmed: “By God! each of us would be martyred” (Ibn Babiwayh, 1413 AH, v. 2, p. 585).

The result is that the human attributes of the Savior and the Promised Mahdi (AS) do not contradict his superhuman and divine attributes.

### **Incompatibility of Utopia with Qur’anic Verses**

like the Savior, Utopia also plays a central role in the Christian and Jewish Messianic foundation. One of the main characteristics of individuals in such a society is their happiness and admission to enter Paradise, for the reappearance of Savior paves ground for human happiness and their entry into Paradise (Montgomery Watt, 1960, v. 7, p. 82). According to Christians and Jews, the return of Savior is when God’s justice and peace settles on earth (Isaiah, 2: 1-4; 11: 1-16; Jeremiah, 23: 3-8; Ezekiel, 37: 15-28).

Spread of Justice (Ibn Babiwayh, 1395 HS, v. 2, p. 372), complete security (Najafī, 1360 HS, p. 474), prosperity (Majlisī, 1403 AH, v. 52, p. 316), development and prosperity (*ibid*, v. 51, p. 78) would be characteristics of the realm of Imam Mahdi (PBUH).

In this sense, the Qur’an does not represent Islamic society as Utopia. In the first Qur’anic verses, God is referred to as “Rabbi al-‘Ālamīn” (Hamd: 1). So He creates and guides many nations: “and there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them (in the past)” (Fatir: 24). Thus the Qur’an does not limit main feature of Utopia, i.e. guidance and prosperity, to a certain society: “And they say: ‘None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian.’ Those are their (vain) desires. Say: ‘Produce your proof if ye are truthful’” (Baqarah: 111), “(Both) the Jews and the Christians say: ‘We are sons of Allah, and his beloved’. Say: ‘Why then doth He punish you for your sins? Nay, ye are but men, of the men’” (Ma’idah: 18) (Hassan, 1985, p. 267).

Besides the belief of Messianism, Qur’an emphasizes on the prosperity of other communities and societies: “Those who believe (in the Quran), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve” (Baqarah: 62) (Hassan, 1985, p. 268).

Additionally, the Qur’an considers the Islamic community as the same as other communities, who will be judged according to the divine laws: “To each among you have we prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you” (*ibid*). Accordingly, Islamic society does not have a unique characteristic of prosperity and guidance until the emergence of the Promised Mahdi (AS).

## Critique of Incompatibility of Utopia with Qur'anic Verses

The consequence of Hassan's criticism of Shiite Messianism was that in the Qur'an, prosperity and guidance are not limited to Islamic society until the advent of Mahdi (AS) leads them all to Paradise, and other communities would be also prospered. This theory derives from the Pluralism theory and the spread of happiness to all religions and beliefs. However, the verses argued by him do not prove his intended result.

According to the verse Fatir: 24, God sent to any community a Prophet in order to guide them (Ṭabāṭabāyī, 1417 AH, v. 17, p. 37-38). But the verse does not imply the necessity of leading all the nations; Qur'an states that many communities were misled in spite of the guidance offered by their prophets, such as the people of Hood (AS), Saleh (AS), Noah (AS) and so on....

The verses Baqarah: 111 and Ma'dah: 18 illustrate the wrong beliefs of Jews and Christians on limitation of guidance to them. It necessitates the false doctrine of misguided Muslims, which the Qur'an explicitly refutes. As a result, these verses do not reject and contradict the confine of guidance to the Islamic community.

As Islam is the last divine religion and its prophet is the last, all past religions are abrogated. Thus if someone remains in those religions at the time of the emergence of Islam, he/she goes astray and turns back from the truth: "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost" ('Ali 'Imran: 85). Hence, the verse Baqarah: 62 refers to the followers of those religions before the advent of Islam. Because if they truly believe in God they will also believe in the Prophet of Islam (PBUH).

To limit guidance to a community does not necessarily results in the happiness of individuals, but every person is different from the other and his guidance is different as well. God will judge them according to His rules. Consequently, the verse (Ma'idah: 48) does not specify guidance and happiness to just the Islamic community.

Accordingly, Riffat Hassan's criticism of the guidance and prosperity of all nations, and therefore not to exclude it to Islam, is not acceptable. Thus the appearance of Mahdism is simultaneous to the guidance and happiness of all human beings. Because the followers of all religions will convert to Islam at that time and will become Muslim: "to overshadow all Religions by it, though the polytheists May dislike it" (Tawbah: 33) (Majlisī, 1403 AH, v. 51, p. 61 and 98). True faith and Islam are also associated with eternal bliss and guidance. Therefore, at that time the real Utopia will be observed.

## Criticism of Imamate Foundation in Shi'a

The second part of Riffat Hassan's criticism of Mahdism in Shi'a is dealt with the criticism of the Imamate foundation. Criticizing this belief, he seeks to disprove the existence of the Promised Mahdi (AS) and thus his Reappearance in the apocalypse. For the Savior is an Imam, the twelfth one. Here are some of Riffat Hassan's statements:

[1] Imamate theory in Shi'a is based on kinship with the Prophet (PBUH), while the Qur'an denounces Arab tribalism and pride in their predecessors. According to the Qur'an, kinship does not guarantee priority; the father of Abraham and the son of Noah have been blamed and cursed for their bad deeds. Qur'an points to the futility of kinship relationship: "Those who reject Faith, neither their possessions nor their (numerous) progeny will avail them aught against Allah" ('Ali 'Imrān: 10), "It is not your wealth nor your sons, that will bring you nearer to Us in degree: but only those who believe and work righteousness" (Saba': 37), "That Day shall a man flee from his own brother, And from his mother and his father, And from his wife and his children. Each one of them, that Day, will have enough concern (of his own) to make him indifferent to the others" ('Abas: 34-37) (Hassan, 1985, p. 276-277). In response to Abraham's



question on the possibility of delivering the divine covenant to his children, the Qur'an emphasizes that the kinship is ineffective: "And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: 'I will make thee an Imam to the Nations.' He pleaded: 'And also (Imams) from my offspring!' He answered: 'But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers'" (Baqarah: 124) (Hassan, 1985, p. 268).

[2] The Shiites believe that Imams are infallible and commit no wrongdoing or sin, while the Qur'an does not say such a thing in any verse. It is not proved intellectually and logically too (*ibid*, p. 277), for every human being can make mistakes.

[3] For Shiites, Imams had all attributes of the Prophet (PBUH), were his successors, and the land would never be left without them. According to the Qur'an, Muhammad (PBUH) is the last prophet, i.e. there would be no prophet after him (*ibid*, p. 278), because the rise of Islam has been accompanied by flourishing reason, so the prophecy in Islam evolved at time. Hence, human life does not always need a guide or a prophet but one must rely on his's own intellect (Iqbal, 1962, p. 126). Therefore, today there is no need for Imam to perform prophetic duties (Hassan, 1985, p. 278).

[4] In Shiite Mahdism, there is a strong emphasis on the Promised Mahdi (AS), while the Qur'an does not refer to it (*ibid*). Thus, the name "al-Mahdi" is not mentioned in the Qur'an but "Hādī" is instead ('A'raf: 186; Furqan: 31). Such Qur'anic references clearly do not prove the existence of the Promised Mahdi (Donaldson, 1933, pp. 227-228).

### Critique of Riffat Hassan's Criticism of Imamate

Riffat Hassan sought to disprove the existence of the Promised Mahdi (AS), criticizing the Shiite doctrine of Imamate. He is criticized here as follows:

[1] The kinship relationship is not absolutely condemned in the Qur'an: "And I follow the ways of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Yusuf: 38), "say: 'Come! let us gather together, our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie!'" ('Ali-'Imran: 61). According to the first verse, Yusuf (AS) points to the reason for his being monotheist and following the Straight Path of the divine prophets, as he followed his infallible fathers, which has given him the knowledge of dream anticipating (Jawadi 'Amoli, 1389 HS, v. 7, p. 22). According to the second verse, the Prophet (PBUH) chose his relatives to challenge with Christians. Furthermore, according to the Qur'anic verses, most prophets were descendants of their former prophet, such as Solomon (AS) and Davood (AS), which proves the possibility of such kinship. The verse *mubāhilah* (challenge) and the company of the infallible Imams with the Prophet (PBUH) also proves it. Therefore, the blame and cursing of some of the prophets' relatives in the Qur'an, such as Abu Lahab, is due to their evil deeds, in which there is no difference between them and other human beings.

It is noteworthy that the proof of Imamate is not merely based on the kinship of the Prophet (PBUH) but also on proofs such as the verse Ma'idah: 67 and the hadith *Thaqalayn*. Therefore, the kinship of Mahdi (as) and thus his succession is not incompatible with the Qur'an.

[2] To prove the infallibility of Imam, following verses are referred: "And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: 'I will make thee an Imam to the Nations.' He pleaded: 'And also (Imams) from my offspring!' He answered: 'But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers' (Baqarah: 124), which points to the Imamate of Abraham (AS), rewarded after many trials and tribulations (Ṭabāṭabāyī, 1417 AH, v. 1, p. 267). Because of "lā" in the phrase "lā yanāl" (Da'ās, 1425 AH, v. 1, p. 53), any oppression by Imam is supposed to be eliminated. In other words, Imam does not commit any injustice and any sin is not compatible with this verse. The rational reason to prove the infallibility of Imam is as follows: Imam is the one whom the people follow in their religious and worldly affairs (Rāzi, 1420 AH, v. 3, p. 457). Accordingly, the assumption that Imam is not

innocent results that he is allowed to do error (Karakji, 1410 AH, v. 1, p. 347). Consequently, the infallibility of Imam is proved by hadith and rational proofs. Therefore, to consider Imam Mahdi (AS) as sinful is refused, but he is Imam and infallible.

[3] In many cases, human reason makes mistake. The scholars' disagreement on various scientific and theological issues also witnesses this claim. Such errors do not occur if human reason reaches its ultimate evolution, needing no guidance. Moreover, many law matters [such as the details of religious law] and religious issues [such as the details of Resurrection] cannot be substantiated by reason, but can be known only through Prophecy (*Nubuwwah*) and Guardianship (*wilāyah*) (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1383 HS, v. 2, p. 479). As a result, human beings always need the existence of the infallible Imam (AS), the present Imam, the Promised Mahdi (AS).

[4] Some verses indicate the existence of the Promised Mahdi (AS):

- "My righteous Believers shall eventually inherit the earth." ('Anbiya': 105). "irth" means transferring property to a person without a contract (Rāghib Isfahāni, 1412 AH, p. 863), which takes place after death. The word "sulh" is also antonymous of "fasad" (corruption), used as verb (*ibid*, p. 489). Therefore, "righteous" literally means the one who has no corruption or error in his actions, i.e. the infallible. According to these two literal meanings, the heir of the earth will be an infallible person. On the other, all men make mistakes except an infallible, so others are not the heirs of the earth. As a result, this verse is related to the Promised Mahdi (Qumī, 1404 AH, v. 1, p. 14).

- "Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion- the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me'." (Nur: 55) This verse says that the divine promise belongs to the believers and the righteous who will become successors of Allah on earth, like those who were caliphs before them. It was stated also that the true righteous is an infallible person, and on the other hand, the prophets (AS) were the caliphs of God on earth. As a result, the promise of caliphate is due to the successor of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) in his absence, which was revealed in case of the Promised Mahdi (AS) (Qumī, 1404 AH, v. 1, p. 14).

Therefore, not only Hassan's claim based on a Qur'anic verse here is not acceptable, but the Promised Mahdi (AS), i.e. Shiite Mahdism, is proved through Qur'an.

### Causes of Mahdism tendency

In the previous sections, Riffat Hassan examined the Shi'ite view of Mahdism in two parts, based on Qur'anic verses: incompatibility of the pillars of Messianism and the Imamate foundation. Then he asks why Messianism has become prevalent in the Islamic world, despite the Qur'an's opposition to the doctrine of Mahdism? Answering this question, he cites the following:

[1] At the beginning of Islam, the Prophet (PBUH) and Muslims had a personal encounter with God. Because of this attitude, they had dedicated their lives to *jihad* for the sake of God, and God was closer to them than their neck vein (Qāf: 16) (Hassan, 1985, p. 282). Because of that, Muslims did not need to mediator or interceder with God. As Islamic territory was expanded, Muslims felt alienated from God and lost their immediate and personal contact with God. Thus, they sought to fill this spiritual gap with the idea of Messianism and taking an interceder with God (*ibid*). The Shiite belief in the Twelfth and Absent Imam hence was dominant among other Muslims (*ibid*, p. 284).

[2] For many Muslims, secularism and materialism were rejected by Islamic advices to simple living and piety (*ibid*). So as Shiite beliefs spread in the Islamic world, the concept of Savior became widespread

among Muslims through Shi'as (*ibid*, p. 285). Furthermore, the emergence of suffering in Muslims' lives had a great impact on prevalence of the idea of Messianism and appearance of a savior among them, which acted as a relief to them. Like women who, when suffering from problems, seek refuge to holy shrines and interceders, and thus they played an essential role in spreading this idea among Muslims (*Ibid*, p. 285-289).

[3] In recent age, the political and social backwardness of Muslims has also led to the spread of Messianism. Because Messianism and the existence of a savior provide a psychological refuge against various difficulties and sufferings (*ibid*, p. 289).

### **Criticism of causes of Mahdism tendency**

It was pointed before that some Qur'anic verses refer to Imam Mahdi (AS). Some Prophetic hadiths are also quoted to support this idea (Majlisī, 1403 AH, v. 51, p. 78). Therefore, Mahdism has existed among Muslims since the rise of Islam, not later for which Muslims needed to take interceder in order to fill their spiritual vacuum or that it led to the spread of materialism. In addition, the perfect man and true interceder at the early Islam was the Prophet (PBUH) himself, indicating that there was also an interceder between man and God at time: "If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come unto thee and asked Allah's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah indeed Oft-returning, Most Merciful." (Nisa': 64).

As a result, Mahdism does not belong to contemporary age and Western developments and Muslims backwardness did not lead to the emergence and spread of Messianism doctrine.

### **Conclusions**

Riffat Hassan's theory of Shiite Mahdism contradicts many verses of the Qur'an. For the Messianic concepts and essential elements, such as intercession, the Savior, and the Utopian, are emphasized in numerous verses. On the other, the doctrine of Imamate, which is the most important base of Shi'a Mahdism and Messianism, is pointed in some verses, including Baqarah: 124, which states that the Imamate position is bestowed only to those who are not oppressors, as well as, immunity from sin and error is the main criterion for the Imam. As the idea of Mahdism is based on the Qur'an and hadith, especially Prophetic hadiths, Riffat Hassan's psychological arguments for Muslims' tendency to a savior and Messianism are not acceptable, as well.

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