'Prophecies' in South Asian Muslim Political Discourse: The Poems of Shah Ni'matullah Wali

C M NAIM

Three "prophetic" Persian poems ascribed to a Shah Ni'matullah Wali have been a fascinating feature in the popular political discourse of the Muslims of south Asia. For nearly two centuries these poems have circulated whenever there has been a major crisis in, what may be called, the psychic world of south Asian Muslims. The first recorded appearance was in 1850, after the "Jihad" movement of Syed Ahmad had failed in the north-west, followed by serial appearances after the debacle of 1857, the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate and the failure of the *Khilafat* and *Hijrat* movements in 1924, the Partition of the country and community in 1947, and the Indo-Pak war of 1971-72. Curiously, these poems have re-emerged in Pakistan in 2010, and have found wider circulation on the internet. This paper traces the evolution of these poems since 1850, contextualises their appearances and offers some explanation for their hold on the minds of the Urdu-knowing Muslims of south Asia.

I wish to thank C M Ahsan (late), Lala Rukh, Shamim Hanfi, Manan Ahmad, Asif Farrukhi, Sunil Sharma, Jennifer Dubrow, Rajarshi Ghose, Ajmal Kamal, and Ishtiaq Ahmad Zilli. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

C M Naim *(naim@uchicago.edu)* is professor emeritus of South Asian Languages and Civilisations at the University of Chicago, United States.

In December 2009, Indian Chief of the Army Staff, General Deepak Kapoor, made certain comments with reference to "the challenges of a possible 'two-front war' with China and Pakistan".[1] The Chinese response is not known, but public denunciations in Pakistan were persistent, one Urdu column catching my particular attention. Orya Maqbool Jan, a former civil servant, first declared that Napoleon lost at Waterloo because he neglected to consult his astrologer that morning.[2] Next he urged his readers and General Kapoor to heed what certain Muslim saints had already "foretold", offering as his coup de grâce some verses from one of the Persian poems attributed to Shah Ni'matullah Wali, prophesying that the Afghans would one day "conquer Punjab, Delhi, Kashmir, Deccan, and Jammu" and "remove all Hindu practices" from the land.

I was intrigued, since I had not seen any reference to the poems for almost three decades. Two weeks later, a friend asked me to check out a Pakistani media phenomenon named Zaid Hamid. As I skipped from one YouTube snippet to another, I was startled to discover how avidly interested Hamid was in Shah Ni'matullah Wali: he had republished the "prophecies", and also made video commentaries on them.[3] A few weeks later, one more reference to the "prophecies" appeared in a column by Harun-ur-Rashid, a senior columnist in *Jang*, the most popular Urdu newspapers in Pakistan.[4] Evidently the Ni'matullahi poems had re-emerged in the political discourse of the Muslims of south Asia, a clear indication to me that all was not right in their psychic world.

I was in India in 1971-72 when East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Following the developments in Indian Urdu newspapers, I was struck by their highly charged tone. Back in Chicago, I read the coverage of the same events in the Urdu press in Pakistan. The result was an article, "Muslim Press in India and the Bangladesh Crisis".[5] Working on it several things surprised me. One was the frequent invocation of the Ni'matullahi "prophecies", and their simultaneous, though independent, publication within a week of the ceasefire in both India and Pakistan. Clearly, they had a hold on the minds of the Urdu-speaking Muslims of south Asia.

I started collecting different texts of the poems, hoping someday to write about them. Little did I know then that less than 40 years later, the poems will not only be quoted again in print but also explicated on TV, and then zipped around the world through the internet, thanks to a self-described "security consultant" and "former *mujahid*" named Zaid Hamid, who has seemingly won the hearts and minds of a great many affluent youth in Pakistan.[6]

The Three Poems (General Description)

At the heart of what follows are three Persian poems in the *qasidah* form, i e, they observe the rhyme scheme, *aa ba ca da ea*, while varying in metre and length. The first poem – henceforward Q1 – contains as its *radif* (recurring rhyme) the word, *mibinam* ("I see"). The second – henceforward Q2 – employs the phrase *paida shawad* ("Is born; Comes to be") as its radif. The third – henceforward Q3 – does not have a radif, and its end-rhymes are assorted words that end in two recurring syllables: "-ana". All three poems are generally ascribed to a single poet named Shah Ni'matullah Wali. Over the years, however, two separate poets with the same name have been posited: one in the 15th century, who wrote Q1, and another, of disputed time and place, who composed Q2 and Q3.

The opening verse of Q1 reads: *qudrat-i-kirdigar mibinam//halat-i-rozgar mibinam* ("I see the Creator's powers; I see how Time fares"). The poem is now universally accepted as composed by a Sufi master who was born Syed Nuruddin but is known to posterity as Shah Ni'matullah Wali of Kirman (Iran). Several reliable manuscripts of his poems include Q1, and it "visionary" tone is in harmony with portions of his other poems. Born in Syria, the Shah travelled widely, and was said to be more than a 100 years old when he died at Mahan, near Kirman, in April 1431. His fame having spread to south India, the Bahmani monarchs invited him, but the shah, instead, sent one of his grandsons. Later, the shah's only son also came to Bidar, where the family's tombs are still much venerated.

In 1888, the eminent Persianist Edward G Browne visited the shah's tomb, where he obtained a text of Q1 from the attendants, copied from the "oldest" manuscript they possessed. Published with a translation in Browne's *History*, it consists of 50 couplets.[7] The versions now found in Iranian, Indian and Pakistani publications commonly have a few more. The Indian monthly, *Shabistan*, published 57 verses in 1972, while the version published in Pakistan by Qamar Islampuri had 55.[8] A recent Iranian booklet on the shah's "forecasts" again has 57 couplets.[9] The serial order of the verses also frequently varies. One also often finds changes in one particular verse, where a few letters are changed in order to deduce different dates according to the *Abjad* system.[10]

A short excerpt from the beginning and another from the near the end, as translated by Browne, should indicate the tenor of the poem as a whole:

> I see the Power of the Maker; I see the state of the time.
> The state of this year is of another sort; not like last year and the year before do I see it.
> These words I speak not from the stars; rather I see them from the Creator.
> When *'ayn, rā* and *dāl* (= 274) have passed of the years I see wonderful doings.
> In Khurasan, Egypt, Syria and 'Iraq I see sedition and strife.
> ….
> When the fifth winter has passed I see in the sixth a pleasant spring.
> The vicar of the Mahdi will appear, yea, I see him plainly.
> I see a king perfect in knowledge; I see a leader endowed with dignity.
> I see the servants of His High Majesty all wearing crowns.
> For 40 years, O my brother, I see the cycle of that Prince continue (ibid: 468-69).

All versions of Q1 contain only one explicit reference to India. It comes in the middle: *hal-i-hindu kharab miyabam//jaur-i-turk-o-tatar mibinam* ("I find the Hindus in dire straits; I witness the tyrannyof the Turks and the Tatars"). That may explain why, after a big start, Q1 eventually became secondary to Q2 and Q3.

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The opening line of Q2 is always: *rast guyam badshahe dar jahan paida shawad* ("Verily, I tell you, a king shall come into this world"). The second line varies, but mostly it reads: *nam timure buwad sahib-qiran paida shawad* ("His name will be Timur, the Lord of Auspicious Stars shall be born"). After prophesying the appearance of Timerlane (1335-1405), Q2 lists his "Mughal" descendents in India until the time the British take over. The latter, Q2 declares, would rule for a century before being devastated by a king from Ghazni. The new Muslim rule would last for 40 years. Then *Dajjal*, the Anti-Christ, would emerge in Isfahan, followed soon after by the promised Mahdi – a righteous guide – who would wage war against him. Next would come Jesus, and destroy the forces of the Anti-Christ, followed immediately by the day of god's final judgment.[11]

The pressure of chronology in Q2 does not allow for much variation in verse order; however, there are plentiful variations within individual couplets, particularly in words that imply dates. For example, in one version a verse implies that the poem was written in 570 AH (1174-5 AD), but in several other versions the same verse, slightly modified, implies 770 AH (1368-9 AD). Similarly, in some versions the prophesied date for the appearance of the Mahdi is 1380 AH (1960-1 AD), but elsewhere it is 1680 AH (ca 2152 AD). In length, one version of Q2 runs to only 28 verses, while another has 40; most versions, however, run to 35 or 36 verses.[12] Here, in loose translation, are some excerpts from Q2:

> I speak the truth: a king shall come into this world. Born in an auspicious conjunction, his name will be Timur Shah.
> After him will come Miran Shah – successor to the one who was born in an auspicious conjunction.
> ….
> Nadir will come from Iran to grab the Indian throne; his sword will launch a massacre in Delhi.
> After him comes Ahmad Shah, a mighty king, to establish his authority over India.
> And when he journeys to the eternal world, dissension will become rife in his family.
> The Sikhs will tyrannise the Muslims; oppression and falsehood will prevail for forty years.
> Then the Nazarenes shall take hold of all of Hindustan, their rule lasting a century.
> But when oppression and falsehood become prevalent a mighty king shall come from Ghazni to destroy them.
> ….
> These remarks are made in 570; the Mahdi will be born in 1380.
> Ni'matullah knows the secrets of the Unknown; his words will doubtless come true.[13]

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The text of Q3 has been least stable. Its versions vary greatly, both in the number of verses and their sequential order. In fact, one might be definite – somewhat – only about its initial and final couplets. They usually read: (first) *chun akhiri zamana ayad badin zaman/shahbaz-i-sidrah bini bar dast-i-ra'igana* ("When the end time comes you shall see the falcon of the sacred Sidrah tree seated on an unheeding hand"); and (last) *khamosh ni'matullah asrar-i-haq makun fash//dar sal-i-kuntu-kanzan bashad chunin*

bayana ("Be silent, Ni'matullah, do not reveal god's secrets. One may speak in this manner alone in the year of *kuntu kanzan*").[14] Given Q3's simple rhyme requirement – any word ending in *ana* – additions are rampant. The shortest version known to me contains 25 couplets, while the longest, presented as two linked poems, has 99.

Q3 opens with a brief mention of how seven generations of the Mughals would rule over India, to be replaced by the Christians. Then it ranges over an assortment of incidents in an extremely loose chronological order. Almost every major event of the first half of the 20th century in India finds place in it as a "prophecy". The following randomly selected verses should indicate its scope:

> You shall see Christians on the royal throne. Through deceit they will make the Muslims captive.
> Islam's commandments will be like an extinguished candle. Ignorance will cover the world. Religious scholars will behave like fools.
> ….
> Two persons named Ahmad shall misguide the Muslims, interpreting the Qur'an as they pleased.
> Plague and famine shall rage simultaneously, bringing death to Muslims everywhere.
> A mighty earthquake will strike Japan, killing one-sixth of its population.
> ….
> In 1388 [i e, 1968 AD], India will be a wilderness – so will have the times changed.
> A defeated G shall join hands with R, and together create hellish weapons of destruction.
> India allies itself with the west, reversing her fortune. Then the third World War shall commence.
> ….
> Suddenly, during the season of the Hajj, the promised Mahdi shall come forward. His name will be proclaimed throughout the world.
> Be silent, Ni'matullah, and don't reveal God's secrets. One may speak in this manner alone in the year of *kuntu kanzan* (Beg, *Ahwal*, 95-99).

Before closing this section, two facts should be pointed out. (1) Unlike Q1, no version of either Q2 or Q3 has ever been found within any poet's collected works; the two occur only by themselves. (2) Though conspicuously more India-related than Q1, both Q2 and Q3 chiefly focus on Delhi, Punjab, and the North-West Frontier – the Muslim populations of Bengal or Kerala, for example, find no mention in them.

The Three Poems (History)

Though Q1 had long existed, and was undoubtedly copied and shared by thousands of people, its debut in the political discourse of south Asian Muslims occurred near the middle of the 19th century. According to Qamar Islampuri, it appeared as a part of a book called *Al-Arba'in fi Ahwal-al-Mahdiyin* ("Forty [Hadith] concerning the Mahdis"), ascribed to "Shah Isma'il 'Shahid' and published at Misri Gunj, Calcutta, on Muharram 25, 1268 AH (21 November 1851)".[15]

Shah Isma'il 'Shahid', a grandson of Shah Waliullah, the illustrious savant of Delhi in the 18th century, was second only to his mentor, Syed Ahmad 'Shahid', in the so-called Jihad Movement of the early 19th century, in which bands of Muslims from British India went to the North-West Frontier to wage war against the Sikhs and their Afghan allies. The movement drew much support from north Indian Muslims, and faced no hindrance from the British at the time. However, it miserably failed, and its two leaders were killed at Balakot in 1831.[16]

Islampuri must have had access to the above book since he directly quotes from it, but it is not mentioned in the available accounts of Shah Isma'il's life.[17] Islampuri's account, however, leaves no doubt that even if the main text of *Al-Arba'in* were composed by Shah Isma'il, the inclusion of Q1 in the book was the publisher's doing. According to him, the text of Q1 is followed by a note:

> Ni'matullah Wali is famous in India as a man of vision and a prefect saint. He was born in the environs of Delhi, and his time (*zamana*) was 560 AH [1165 AD], as is known from the collection of his poems, where these verses, famous in Hindustan, are found. They are published here since they contain a description of the [expected] Mahdi. Written on the 25th of Muharram, 1268.[18]

The publisher's remarks show that though Q1 was sufficiently known in India in 1851, its actual author was not.[19] The poem, instead, had gained a new author as well as an earlier date: an alleged Ni'matullah of Delhi of the 12th century, replacing the actual Ni'matullah of Kirman of the 14th century.

Nearly 20 years later, Q1 made it into the public record in a big way when three unsigned articles on the "Wahhabis" of India appeared in the *Calcutta Review*.[20] The first included a full translation of Q1, arguably based on the text published in *Al-Arba'in*.[21] The author introduces the poem after an extended discussion of the Muslim belief in the coming of the Mahdi before the end of the world, and how the followers of Syed Ahmad used the same to claim that role for him. "Pious forgeries", he then adds, "were committed to support the claims, notably the following *qasidah*". Here are the opening and closing verses in his version, together with two verses from the middle:

> I see the power of God, the state of the world.
> I do not see by astrology, but by inspiration.
> I turn my eyes towards Korasan, Egypt, Syria, Persia; I see tumults and wars.
> There will be many changes in the world; of the thousands I see one.
> …
> After many years have passed, I see that the earth will become beautiful.
> I see in Syria a king learned and of great repute.
> Different from the present time, I see days as it were in a dream.
> I see that after 1,200 years have passed, wonderful events will occur.[22]
> …
> I see the swords of hard-hearted persons lying rusty in their sheaths, blunt and useless.
> I see the hyena and the sheep, the tiger and deer, living together in peace.
> I see the Turkish troops sitting quiet, and their enemies idle;
> And I see Niyamatullah apart from all others in a place of retirement (*Calcutta Review*, April 1870, 100-01).

A few months later, in 1871, an excerpt from that translation appeared in W W Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans*.[23] Hunter, a ranking colonial officer, wrote with sincere concern about the plight of Bengali Muslims but became quite shrill when it came to what he called "The Chronic Conspiracy Within Our Territory". "Prophecies were forged to give still greater certainty [to the 'Wahhabi' claims]", Hunter wrote, "of which the following verses, taken from a long poem still sung in Northern India, may serve as an example". His quotation is a 12-line construction, using selected bits and pieces from the above translation.[24]

Hunter's book drew a passionate rejoinder from the eminent Muslim leader, Syed Ahmad Khan, who challenged much of Hunter's textual evidence, but surprisingly made no comment concerning the extract from Q1.[25] Was he thereby conceding the poem's alleged pre-eminence in the "Wahhabi" literature? And, given his reputation as a historian of Delhi, does his silence confirm the claim that some Shah Ni'matullah of Delhi composed Q1 in the sixth century Hijri?[26] We may never know.

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While we know for certain that Q1 first appeared in print in 1851, we can only assume that Q2 was also published around that time, perhaps by the same publisher. The earliest definite reference to Q2 occurs in a long memorandum from T E Ravenshaw, included in *Papers Connected with the Trial of Moulvie Ahmedoollah of Patna and Others for Conspiracy and Treason*, published in 1866.[27] Ravenshaw, the presiding magistrate at the trial a year earlier, includes Q2 in his list of "Wahabee books and pamphlets", describing it as "a kusseeda, or poem, by Moulvie Nyamatoollah, which contains a very remarkable prophecy of the overthrow of British power, and the appearance of the king of the west in 1270 Hijri is foretold; the date has been altered to suit latter years and to keep up faith in the prophecy."[28]

Ravenshaw's translation (35 couplets) received wider exposure four years later, first in one of the above-mentioned articles in the *Calcutta Review* and then in Hunter's book. The journal version was almost a verbatim reproduction of Ravenshaw's translation.[29] Hunter, in his turn, used a long extract from Ravenshaw's version, placing it immediately after the extract from Q1 and calling it "another favourite prophecy".[30] None of the three British authors assigned a time or place to the poet named in the final verse. They clearly believed that both Q1 and Q2 were contemporary forgeries, when in fact one of them – Q1 – was definitely not.

Then came Syed Ahmad Khan's blistering review. Critiquing the texts listed by Hunter, Khan wrote, "The fourth work, viz, *Prophetic Poem*, foretelling the downfall of the British power, and a few more prophecies at p 43, were first published by Saint Vali Nyamut Ullah, a dervish of Cashmere, who died in 1028 Hijra, or 1618 AD." He then flatly rejected its evidentiary value, by contending, "Such verses are generally written by astrologers and by men pretending to a knowledge of Ramal and Jafar…. Wahabis believe in no prophecy. Their faith teaches them that no man, not even Muhammad himself, had any knowledge of futurity."[31] While he located the poet in far away Kashmir, Khan brought the poem closer to his own time by almost 500 years, thus, arguably, making the author's existence and his own knowledge about him more credible.[32] Regrettably, like the Calcutta publisher 20 years earlier, Khan too failed to indicate the source for his claim.

A remarkable example of how Q2 was later used is found in an extended commentary on five selected verses by an anonymous Hyderabadi writer, who called his pamphlet *Muzhdabad Sultan-i-Dakan* ("Happy Tidings, the Sultan of Deccan").[33] The five verses are:

> Afterward, the Nazarenes shall get hold of all of India, and rule over it for a century.
> But when, under their rule, tyranny and religious innovation will become rampant, a Western King (*Shah-i-Gharbi*) will come to destroy them.
> A terrible war shall then follow between the two, and much blood will be shed.
> The King of the Westland (*Shah-i-Gharbistan*), aided by a Jihad, will triumph; the Christians, for sure, will be defeated.
> I declare so in 880 Hijri, and all this should take place after 1280.

In 20, closely argued pages, using numerological stipulations according to the rules of *Jafar*, the author repeatedly contends that the "western King" was not some ruler of Afghanistan, as generally believed, but Mahbub Ali Khan, the ruling Nizam of Hyderabad, whom the author urges to attack the British and take over Delhi as prophesied by the shah.[34]

Millenarian Time

Most messianic beliefs among the Muslims are pegged to certain moments in serial time. The believers may expect, for example, some extraordinary event near the end of a Hijri century or millennium. Similar significance is also granted to certain units of time – 40 days or years, for example, or some impending centenary. The latter, possibly, was the reason for the publication of Q1 in 1267-68 AH (1851), 97 years after the British victory at Plassey in 1757 (1170-71 AH). Many Muslims could then hope for a turn in fortune, particularly if it were already "prophesied". Similar was the case with Q2, both during and after the Rebellion/*Ghadar* of 1857-58 (1274-75 AH) – a major emblematic event in itself.[35]

Nothing of that magnitude occurred in south Asia during the rest of the 19th century, but there were disconcerting events abroad connected with the Ottoman Caliphate. After 1857, the names of Ottoman Caliphs were invoked in the Friday *khutba* ("formal sermon") in many mosques across India, giving them a sanctity they did not have earlier. Consequently, when they suffered serious losses of territory near the end of the 19th century, many Indian Muslims were greatly disturbed. Not surprisingly, sometime between the 1880s and 1990s, there began to circulate in north India a third "prophetic" poem in Persian, ascribed, naturally, to Shah Ni'matullah Wali.

The earliest version I have found of Q3, however, appeared in a 1913 publication of Khwaja Hasan Nizami (1878-1955): *Kitab-al-Amr ya'ni Imam Mahdi ke Ansar aur un ke Fara'iz* ("The Book of Commands, i e, the Friends of Imam Mahdi and their Duties").[36] The book is described as the expanded, new edition of the second part of his *Shaikh Sanusi*. Nizami, who gained much fame in the first half of the 20th century by pioneering "Sufi Journalism", possessed a remarkable talent for evocative Urdu together with a rare instinct for anticipating what his public wanted. Of the numerous self-promoting projects launched by Nizami during his life one was to declare himself a Sanusi Sufi in 1913. He claimed that he had been initiated by a Sanusi sheikh he met during a trip to the Middle East in 1911, and began to champion the Libyan Sufis' claim that their recently deceased leader, Syed Muhammad al-Mahdi (1845-1902), had been the promised Mahdi.[37] That also allowed him to write about "prophecies" concerning Indian Muslims – always a bestselling topic in Urdu. This is how he described his project years later:

> In November 1911, I published the first pamphlet, *Zuhur-i-Hazrat Imam Mahdi-i-Akhir-al-Zaman* ["The Appearance of Hazrat Imam Mahdi of the end time"], then, in 1912, its second part, *Kitab-al-Amr* ["The Book

of Command"]. Next appeared the third part, *Faizan-i-Sanusi* ["The Sanusi Beneficence"], in 1913. The fourth part came out in 1914, with the title *Tin par Ek* ["One upon Three"], and also the fifth part, *Naguftah Bih* ["Better Left Unsaid"]. In 1915, I published the sixth part called *Jarmani Khilafat* ["German Caliphate"], but the government confiscated all the copies.[38] Later, in 1927, I published a book, *Imam-al-Zaman ki Amad* ["The Coming of the Imam of the Age"], in which I summarised all the above. Printed four times, it sold extremely well. It is still available from the office of *Munadi* at Delhi for ten annas.[39]

The verses from Q3 are quoted in the second part, *Kitab-al-Amr*, after Nizami's elaborate discourse on the many diverse "signs" that had convinced him that the Day of Judgment (*qiyamat*) was imminent. Sample: women outnumbered men in population; tobacco smoking became rampant; clouds failed to bring rain when needed; and people reported dreams in which Emperor George V converted to Islam. After further arguing that the Russians and Germans were the Biblical Gog and Magog, and that according to the Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi (d 1240) the promised Mahdi would appear in 1335 AH (1917 AD), Nizami introduces the verses: "Now I copy some verses from the famous *qasidah* of Hazrat Shah Ni'matullah Wali so that my readers, taking everything into consideration, may form their own conclusions. They must not depend only on what I have written; they should also see what is manifest in old writings." Then follow 11 couplets, making the following "prophecies": (1) A mighty earthquake hits India. (2) Two men named Ahmed wrongly interpret the Qur'an. (3) Plague and famine occur concurrently in India. (4) War rages between Japan and Russia, followed by a deceptive peace. (5) Abdul Hamid II comes to throne in Turkey. Christians attack, but god comes to his aid. (6) The Afghans rise again and conquer Mt Suleiman. King Habibullah triumphs. (7) The "Fifth" (*khamis*) carries the banner of Islam into the land of the infidels.

Nizami then adds: "The persistence of the *qasidah* establishes its veracity and accuracy. I have seen it 10 or 12 times, in both old and new copies. No educated Indian household is without it. That's why I limit myself here to the few verses I know by heart."[40]

In the 1940 pamphlet, however, Nizami provides a fuller version. It runs to 25 couplets, but some verses of 1913 are missing. While ignoring the omissions, Nizami makes some interesting confessions.

> On the basis of the *qasidah* and other prophecies, I too had mistakenly believed that the Mahdi was about to appear. Then Amir Amanullah Khan's amazing achievements in 1927 had me convinced that he was the promised Mahdi – I even stated that much in my book, *Imam-al-Zaman ki Amad*. Also for years I mistakenly believed that the English king would accept Islam.

However, ignoring his admission of fallibility, Nizami next summarises most of his earlier "prophecies", then presents versions of Q3 and Q2, with this introduction:

> The *qasidah* poems of Shah Ni'matullah Wali are famous in India, Iran and Afghanistan, though little attention is paid to their authenticity and accuracy. Some call them outright forgeries, while others charge that 'people loyal to the government' are spreading the rumor that they were not by the Shah. I can say nothing in that regard. I simply present here these hard-to-find poems. Only God knows if they are true or false.[41]

The verses Nizami leaves out are those that mention (1) the Afghans and Amir Habibullah, (2) Sultan Abdul Hamid, (3) the "Fifth", and (4) the two wrongful interpreters of the Qur'an named Ahmad.[42] Among the added new "prophecies" are: the Bolshevik victories in central Asia; Islam's diminution in Turkey and Iran; and the appearance in India of "a banner-carrying man from among the thread-wearing people, weak in body but mighty of word". Disarmingly, Nizami adds in a footnote: "[The latter] couplet appears to be new and forged – someone's attempt to highlight Mahatma Gandhi. I have kept it here only for the interest of my readers."[43]

Time of Calamities

The crisis for many Indian Muslims caused by Ottoman Turkey's entry in the first world war on the side of Germany, grew worse with Turkey's abject defeat and the concomitant threat to the institution of the Caliphate. It brought about the so-called *Khilafat* and *Hijrat* movements. It must have also caused such palliative exercises as the discovery and sharing of "prophecies" that promised a glorious future. I am confident there were many printings of the three poems between 1914 and 1924 though so far I have not found any.[44] I did, however, find a version of Q3 (46 couplets) that was originally published in 1931, and is reproduced in Islampuri's book.[45] Intriguingly, 11 new verses near the beginning roundly denounce corrupt religious scholars, accusing them of vanity, ignorance, and falsehood. Apparently, by then, Q3 had also entered the discourse of sectarian antagonism that then raged between the Deobandis and the Barelvis and has not subsided yet.[46]

The next set of political events, unique in their effect on the psyche of Indian Muslims, happened in 1947-48. The division of India, the breakup of the community, and the long spell of bloodshed and migration, caused profound uncertainties, and many in the community again sought solace in the Ni'matullahi "prophecies". Q3 again made an appearance – with necessary additions. Islampuri writes:

> By mid-1948 some clever people had taken the second forged poem attributed to Ni'matullah Wali – its *qafiyah* was *bayana*, and contained couplets up to the Non-cooperation Movement – and published it in *Zamindar*, *Shahbaz* and other Lahore journals, with some fifteen or sixteen additional couplets. The new verses said: after India's division, Muslims will lose their largest city, and a massacre would occur between the two Eids; then, at the start of the next Hijri year, Muslim hands shall take up the sword again and conquer India. Because the late Mir Usman Ali's Hyderabad State still existed, [the forgers] also added a verse about "an Usman rising with the ambition of a *ghazi*" (Islampuri, *Hazrat,* 41).[47]

Islampuri also quotes from an editorial in the respected daily *Imroz* (Lahore), dated 19 July 1948, denouncing the publication of the forgery.[48]

A different extract – from *Jang* (Karachi), 25 December 1971 – indicates that Q2 was also published in 1948, in a monthly called *Qindil* (Karachi), under the heading: *Shikast-i-Hindustan* ("Defeat of India").[49] Someone in India sent a copy to the scholarly journal *Ma'arif* (Azamgarh), asking about its authenticity. The reply in its February 1948 issue recounted the biography of the Shah of Kirman and accepted Q1 as authentic, but it declared the new poem to be a forgery and political propaganda.[50] The reply was also reported in Pakistan.

The poems' hold, however, did not diminish. When the next soul-wrenching crisis came around, namely, the dissolution of

the original Pakistan in 1971-72, publication and distribution of both Q2 and Q3, often with additions and changes, soon followed. Islampuri writes: "In a united India and over one hundred years nearly 80 couplets were forged in the Shah's name, but in the mere 25 years of Pakistan's existence forgery occurred much faster, producing nearly 58 couplets."[51]

As I followed the developments in Indian Urdu journals at the time, there were first only scattered references. Soon, however, the poems and the shah became hot topics. Early in February 1972, *Shabistan* (New Delhi), then the most popular Urdu magazine in India, published a version of Q3 (71 couplets), together with a commentary. The article contained several bold headings, including "Five Hundred Years Old Prophecies", "Partition of India", and "India's Victory in Bangladesh". It was then reprinted over three issues of the weekly *Jam'iat Times* (Delhi), under the title: "Five Hundred Years Old Prophecies Proven True Word for Word".[52]

"Corrective" responses soon followed. Two appeared in the weekly *Aza'im* (Lucknow). The first was by Muhammad Manzur Nu'mani (d 1997), a prominent religious scholar. He first recalled hearing about the "prophecies" as a young boy at the time of the first world war, then mentioned receiving, in January 1971, a cutting from some obscure weekly in Bihar, containing one of the poems and a commentary. It made him realise that "the Muslims of India, instead of using their God-given intelligence under the present circumstances, were taking the beguiling and torpor-inducing prophecies of the poem as a saint's vision of God's will, waiting for it to come true." Nu'mani then pointed out what to him were obvious absurdities: the verses were in bad Persian and devoid of any literary quality, and many "prophecies" contained details that could not have been known earlier. Most conclusive for him, however, was the *andaz* ("style") of the "prophecies" – "it was not of the kind found in *mustanad* ('authentic') prophecies, made by blessed prophets and perfect saints."[53]

The next issue of *Aza'im* contained an article by Hasan Sani Nizami, the son and spiritual heir of Khwaja Hasan Nizami. He asked his readers not to look for miraculous cures but instead remember what the Prophet had told a Beduin: "First tie your camel to a peg, only then entrust it to God's care". "We don't deny that saints could have visions of future events", he continued, "but it is also a fact that saints never act like astrologers. They avoid disclosing their visions, and when compelled to do otherwise they use extreme caution." However, referring to his father's booklet on the coming of the Mahdi, he argued that forecasts concerning the Mahdi or the Day of Judgment were a different matter – they were accepted points of faith for all Muslims.[54]

Meanwhile the editors of *Shabistan*, realising they had stumbled upon something big, published three more articles in quick succession. The first was headlined: "Eight Hundred Years Old Prophecies: The Remaining Verses of the *Qasidah* of Shah Ni'matullah Wali". It contained a long introduction, followed by 26 more verses from Q3 with Urdu translation and commentary. Their Q3 now had 97 verses! The introduction was a fine mix of fantasy and half-truth, anchored to fabulous claims of research. Besides adding 300 years to its age, the article claimed that Q3 had once adorned the library of the Mughals and was subsequently banned by the British.[55]

The next issue carried another article with the same title, containing the text of Q2 (40 couplets). Its introduction claimed that the text was based on three manuscripts, and that one of them described the poet as "a Shah Ni'matullah Wali buried at Shivpur near Gwalior".[56] The final article appeared in June and reproduced a version of Q1 (57 couplets), identifying its author as the Shah of Kirman and offering several stories of his "miracles".[57]

Back in Chicago I soon discovered that Q3 had also been published in Pakistan around the same time: in four issues of the daily *Mashriq* (Lahore) in December 1971, and in the popular weekly *Chatan* (Lahore) of 10 January 1972. I could, however, access only the latter. It also carried a separate article by Ehsan Qureshi Sabiri, arguing that Q3 was a forgery, and that Shah Ni'matullah Wali of Kirman had written only one "prophetic" *qasidah* (i e, Q1). Sabiri, nevertheless, assured his readers that Prophet Muhammad had himself promised Muslim warriors a conclusive victory over India, "for which they shall be spared the flames of Hell".[58]

Eventually a friend gave me Qamar Islampuri's invaluable little book, which was in its fifth printing in May 1973.[59] Besides providing a glimpse into the long history of the three poems, it better informed me on the reactions in Pakistan to their recent reappearance. It also drew my attention to a pamphlet issued in September 1971 by the Hizbullah wing of the Deendar Anjuman at Karachi.

The Anjuman is a small messianic movement, started in 1924, in the former state of Hyderabad, by a Syed Siddiq Hussain (b 1886), who claimed that the Prophet had appeared to him in a dream and appointed him an Imam for the purpose of spreading Islam in India. Simultaneously, he also declared himself to be an avatar of the Lingayat saint Channabasaveswara, born to bring the Hindus into the fold of Islam.[60] The movement, at first, remained obscure, limited to a few cities in south India. Then several followers migrated to other places, in particular to the northwest. During 1947-48, the Anjuman allegedly collaborated with the Razakars against the Indian state, and Siddiq Hussain was imprisoned. He died soon after his release in 1952. Since then, the Anjuman has had two branches, one at Hyderabad, the other at Karachi. The Indian branch briefly emerged from obscurity in July 2000, when it was accused of attacking churches and temples in south India, though the charge was never proved. In Pakistan too, the Anjuman never gained much public notice except in a few denunciations from Muslim religious organisations.[61] How big the two groups actually are, or how much they collaborate in their avowed aim to make India Muslim, is not known.

Making India Muslim

A firm belief in the so-called "*Ghazwa-i-Hind*", the prophesied final and full Muslim conquest of India, has always been fundamental to the Pakistani members of the Deendar Anjuman. In 1967, for example, when the late king Zahir Shah of Afghanistan visited Pakistan, the Anjuman published a lengthy petition, urging the king to take up "the divinely ordained task of making India Muslim". In his support, the writer quoted verses from Q3, along with other visions and predictions.[62] The Pakistani branch also revived the Anjuman's militant wing, Hizbullah, and the latter's commandant, Habibullah Shah, published in September 1971 a booklet entitled *Haqiqat-i-Qiyam-i-Pakistan*

Ba-tausiq-i-Bisharat ("The Truth of the Foundation of Pakistan as Confirmed by Prophecies").[63]

Bisharat presents to the reader four "prophetic" poems: the first is Q2 (39 couplets), the second (43 couplets) and third (56 couplets) are actually a hugely extended version of Q3, though presented as two separate poems, while the fourth is Q1 (27 couplets). The poet's name is given as "Ni'matullah Shah Wali", who was "born at Samarqand, [but] lived and served mankind in Kirman and Kashmir." The new verses in Q3 are deplorable as poetry, and a great many are merely harangues, ordering the Muslims to become "truly" Muslim. More interestingly, the verse containing the name "Habibullah" – in the past interpreted as referring to an Afghan Amir – is interpreted as referring to the author of the booklet, under whose command victory was assured in any jihad against India.[64]

The Anjuman booklet might not have gained much circulation in 1971 – the version of Q3 in *Chatan* in 1972 ran to only 59 verses, 40 less than in *Bisharat* – but with the passage of time it seemingly gained wider readership. Either through the Anjuman's followers in the north-west or because of its strong message of a jihad against India, the *Bisharat* versions of Q2 and Q3 attracted attention in Pakistan's armed forces, as is evident in a book entitled *Crusade?*.[65] Its author, Ghulam-e-Muhammad Khair-ul-Bashar Farooqi confides to his readers that he regarded a Major Muhammad Amir Afzal Khan as his "spiritual father" and felt very close to "the faithful" of the Lashkar-i-Taiba. Mainly his book is a screed against an alleged "Jewish-Christian Crusade" to destroy Islam, and reprints someone else's Urdu translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. But its 10th chapter (23 pages) is on the Ni'matullahi "prophecies", which he uses to augment his brief that both India and the US shall fail in their conspiracy against Islam and Pakistan and eventually destroy themselves in the process.

According to Farooqi, the Shah's "prophecies" were nearly a thousand years old, and had so far turned out to be true "word for word". "In fact", he adds, "the so-called prognosticators and astrologers of the west stole from the Shah in order to gain a name for themselves". Farooqi states that he obtained a booklet containing the "prophecies" – Q3 (74 couplets) – from a Colonel Abdur Ra'uf, and that the English translations/commentaries he offers were done by Colonel Matlub Husain, Colonel Abdul Qadir, Colonel Muhammad Hamid, and Muhammad Din.[66] His chapter carries three titles: (1) "A Spiritual Overview", (2) "What Is Going to Happen in the Next One Thousand Years?" (3) "547 AH [1152 AD]" In other words, his readers could expect the "prophecies" to come true within the next 150 years.

A few things in Farooqi's version deserve more notice. The verses concerning the Afghans appear under a subheading: "Start of the Afghanistan Jihad, 1979". The name Habibullah – once interpreted as the "King of Afghanistan" – is translated as an expression: "Friend of Allah". Similarly, the name Usman in another couplet – an earlier writer identified him as the Nizam Usman Ali Khan – is now taken to refer to the third Caliph. Another couplet is given an unusual twist: "All the enemies of Islam will be crushed. The Creator would in his (sic) Infinite Mercy bring forth a person named Akram, for the purpose."[67] The warrior-translators also place much hope in the Turks, whom they expect to launch the final campaign against the west, lasting six years. "The divine punishment will be so severe that [most of Europe and the United States] will become a forgotten story. The christianity (sic) will never raise its head again."[68] Then the promised Mahdi shall make his appearance and bring human history to its prophesied end.

Zaid Hamid's pamphlet, available across the world on the internet, is the latest chapter in this long and dismal story.[69] Its title, "Ni'matullah Shah Wali", clearly indicates Hamid's source, for that arrangement of the name occurs only in the Anjuman's booklet. All other books have: "Shah Ni'matullah Wali". Hamid also makes the relationship more explicit by devoting one page to the Anjuman, adding: "Deendar Anjuman is not a product of human mind; it is a spiritual (*ruhani*) Islamic movement."

Hamid's ambition for his pamphlet is revealed in its URL: "The Muslim Nostradamus, Prophecies in Urdu". His selection of verses is organised under three headings: "Forecasts for the Past"; "Forecasts for the Present"; and "Forecasts for the Future". Not bothered by poetic or chronological incongruence, he grabs any "prophecy" that serves his purpose. And so he takes a verse from Q3 to "prophesy" the role of the Mukti Bahini in 1971-72, and another from Q2 to "prophesy" the fall of Dhaka, then lists them next to each other as if they were from a single poem.

Hamid is obsessed with the so-called *Ghazwat-al-hind* or Islam's conclusive triumph over India. The final section of his version, "Prophecies for the Future", is exclusively devoted to it. Hamid starts with the verse in Q2 about *Shah-i-Gharbi*, the "Western King", following it with a verse from Q3, which he interprets: "God will manifest His special favour upon the Muslims of Western Pakistan (sic), and their hands will display power to act". In other words, Hamid suggests that instead of an Afghan king it could be a man from Pakistan or someone from among "the Western Faithful" (*mominan-i-gharbi*) who would undertake the final jihad. Then, Hamid assures his readers, men from Afghanistan, China, Iran, Turkey, and the Arab countries will join him, while the Indian Muslims will rise in revolt. After a battle raging for six years, India will become entirely Muslim, and a Muslim king would rule it for 40 years. Then will come the anti-Christ, followed by the Mahdi and Jesus, and finally an end to the world, as we know it.[70]

That Pakistan's role is crucial in Hamid's deadly vision is further made clear near the end of the booklet, where he devotes several pages to quotations from such recent Urdu luminaries as Qudratullah Shihab (d 1986), Mumtaz Mufti (d 1995), and Ishfaq Ahmad (d 2004) – all highly talented writers and self-promoting "seers", whose writings are still avidly read by many in Pakistan. One example will suffice:

> Mumtaz Mufti, in his book *Alakh Nagri*, writes what Qudratullah Shihab once told him. He (Shihab) was in Holland, studying in the library that has the world's largest collection of Islamic books, when he came upon a manuscript in which Imam Barri was reported to have said: 'A city will come up in the region [that is now Pakistan], which will become pivotal to all Muslim countries'.

Summarising the Prophecies

The above chronological narrative may now be summarised to bring out the fascinating trajectories the Ni'matullahi "prophecies" took in south Asia, as they grew in number from one to three. The original Q1 of the Shah of Kirman began in Iran as a harbinger of hope and a reminder of the promised Mahdi. Arguably, it brought

solace to the local Muslim population in the context of Timur's invasions in the 1380s, and the coming to end of the 8th century Hijri. Subsequently, it could have also catered to the messianic impulses of the supporters of Shah Isma'il, the founder of Iran's Safavid dynasty. The poem reached south India with the Shah's descendants, then gradually spread more widely. Did it play any role in the Mahdavi movement of the 15th century, which started in north India but survived more in the south and north-west? Was it circulating during the times of Akbar and Jahangir as the first Hijri millennium came to a close? These are important unanswered questions. We only know for sure that Q1 came to wide public notice in the 1850s, first in support of the remnants of the so-called "Jihad" movement, and then to make "preordained", and thus reconcilable, the terrible events of 1857 and their aftermath. But Q1 could not fully serve that cause; it needed indigenous augmentation. And so the south Asian Muslim milieu came up with Q2, attributing it to Shah Ni'matullah Wali to give it authority and history. As years progressed and new crises arose, particularly in Turkey, Afghanistan, and the Arab lands, Q2 itself had to be augmented. First it gained additional verses, then eventually a companion "Ni'matullahi" poem, probably before the end of the 19th century.

While both Q1 and Q2 had the classical rhyme requirement of both a radif and a qafiyah, the new poem, Q3, did away with radif and used a most common adjectival ending for its qafiyah. Now any would-be visionary could compose "prophetic" poetry. As various political crises occurred in the new century – first world war; the end of the Ottoman Caliphate; the second world war; Partition of India; the dissolution of the original Pakistan – Q3 kept gaining verses. From barely 30 in the first decade of the 20th century, they came to be almost 100 in the seventh – all attributed to what by then had become a brand name: Shah Ni'matullah Wali.

The Western King

There was also a second trajectory. When the Shah of Kirman wrote Q1 near the end of the 14th century, he claimed his words were based on what was revealed to him by god's will (*az kirdigar*), and not dictated by stars (*az nujum*). His vision was exclusively his own; he did not invoke other prophecies. We do not know what he did with the poem. Did he send it to some aspiring prince? Did he have it distributed more generally through his disciples? We have no answers. We only know that he composed his verses within an existing Muslim messianic discourse that posited a redemptive Mahdi and a reappearance of Jesus that would bring the world to its end. India played no role to play in that scheme of things. His single verse referring to India, in fact, described the Hindus as suffering under Turk and Tatar oppressors – a situation we could extrapolate he expected would end as his "prophecy" came true.

The second poem, Q2, turns its back on Q1's central Asia and Iran, focusing almost exclusively on India and its Mughal and British rulers. There is no specific mention of India's Hindus, and the Sikhs are mentioned only with reference to Guru Nanak and the land of Punjab. The only people vigorously invoked are an "Afghan" or "Western" king and his armies. Here it might be useful to recall that while Afghanistan could have been invoked in the spirit in which Shah Waliullah, in the 18th century, allegedly invited Ahmad Shah Abdali to invade Delhi, it was also the place to which, in the 20th century, thousands of Indian Muslims migrated during the Khilafat movement in a grand gesture of *hijrat*, and where other nationalists set up an "Indian National Government" under Mahendra Pratap. In fact, as late as 1941, Subhas Chandra Bose fled to Afghanistan to find his way eventually to Berlin and Tokyo. In other words, in the early decades of the 20th century, popular mind could see Afghanistan intimately linked to India in many more ways.

While its main concern is also India, Q3 contains much that relates to other countries, especially in the "Muslim" world. Significantly, it also contains remarks that seem trite but are in fact the tried and true weapons in sectarian confrontations – "moral decay has set in the society"; "religious scholars are ignorant of Islam, and practice deceit"; "sinful persons control religious and social affairs." As years pass and verses increase, the two themes remain significant, reflecting the pan-Islamism that found favour among south Asian Muslims in the first half of the last century and the steady increase in sectarianism within the dominant Sunni Islam.

We should note that except for the anonymous manuscript from Hyderabad and the publications of the Deendar Anjuman, no version of Q2 or Q3 makes any mention of the so-called *Ghazwat-al-Hind*. Also, until we come to the commandant of the Deendar Anjuman at Karachi, no commentator makes any claim that involves him. They place their hopes and ambitions elsewhere.

Zaid Hamid's cobbled together version marks a significant departure in one way: his poem turns its back on the Muslims of present-day India and Bangladesh and focuses primarily on Pakistan. Its first part, "Prophecies of the Past", uses verses from Q2 and Q3 to swiftly narrate a haphazard political history of south Asia, beginning with Timur and ending with the Mukti Bahini. The next part, "Prophecies about the Present", consists of verses chosen exclusively from different versions of Q3, and reads like a jeremiad. It bewails the various evils – impiety and corruption, aping of Christian ways, neglect of Islamic virtues – that allegedly ail the Muslims of Pakistan, thus suggesting a reason for Pakistan's debacle in 1972. The section's final couplet, however, offers some hope: "The Banu Sulaiman, i e, the Afghans, will rise like honourable people and fight back, blessed with God's special favour, with hundred-fold more bravery". Then comes the final section, "Prophecies for the Future", in which Hamid, using two verses from Q2 and two from Q3, promptly declares: "(1) When tyranny and heresy will become common, a Western King, well-equipped to run the state, shall come forward to remove them. (2) God will manifest His special favour to the Muslims of Western Pakistan, and their hands will become powerful to act. (3) A lion from among the lions of Hazrat Ali will appear, a killer of infidels. He will be a partisan of the faith of the Prophet and a defender of the land. (4) He shall bring to his aid invisible help from the Northeast." Near the end, Hamid explains that the "Western King", using extraordinary weapons, shall achieve an unbelievable victory over the infidels and then reign for 40 years. Exactly who the "King" might be becomes clear if we remember that Hamid's full name is Syed Zaid Zaman Hamid, and that all Syeds, being descendants of Ali, are his "lions". Not surprisingly, Hamid's version totally leaves out the "Habibullah" mentioned in Q2, but underscores references to the Afghan people as supporters of his own "Western King".[71]

That was the second trajectory the "prophetic" poems took – from being carriers of consoling tidings they turned into a kind of martial manifesto. It was a potential they always had but became overtly evident as their proponents became more consciously martial.

Finally we must ask: why, over at least two centuries, have so many cherished these "prophecies", and why so many still do?

Prophecies are like conspiracy theories; they are both an opiate and a weapon to the despairing. They lessen the latter's pain, and fortify them against any calamity that appears to them inexplicable, far too overwhelming, or manifestly undeserved. Prophecies enable the desperate to survive, and the forlorn to hope. For believers, a prophecy puts the crisis at hand within a fundamentally non-hostile, even comforting, context: God's unfathomable plan for the humankind on earth. By providing a "rationale", prophecies make any crisis appear "rational", and thus humanly manageable – through peaceful piety, no doubt, but also through mundane efforts, including violence.

As seen above, the Ni'matullahi "prophecies" place every soul-wrenching crisis faced by south Asian Muslims within a messianic narrative – the coming of the Mahdi – that is familiar to them and, being willed by god, requires no further accounting. Simultaneously, they introduce an element of hope too. Some saviour – "Habibullah", the "Western King", the Mahdi, Jesus – would eventually defeat the enemy. In that scheme of things, the "Western King" et al functioned as blank spaces that the believers fill in differently at different times. Shockingly, no believer seems to care that every such scenario of hope is actually very shortlived – the "prophesied" total victory of Islam does not lead to centuries of peace and human possibilities; on the contrary, it brings all human possibilities to an end in mere 40 years.

When Syed Ahmad Khan wrote, "Wahabis believe in no prophecy", he tacitly acknowledged that most other Muslims did.[71] It was as true in 1973 as it was in 1872, and as it is now. Qamar Islampuri thoroughly debunked Q2 and Q3 in 1973, but described Q1 as *ilhami* ("divinely inspired"). Now consider the following, culled from prominent Pakistani newspapers in just two months in 2010:

> Seven centuries ago a strange man was born in the sub-continent: Shah Ni'mat Wali (sic). With respect to visions, he towers over others. Britain was then an insignificant island, but he prophesied the British take-over of India. Three centuries before Guru Nanak's birth, he foretold the rise of the Sikhs.... Professor Ahmad Rafiq Akhtar is ...is a genius and a scholar, and also a wayfarer on the mystical path…In early 2000, he told the American ambassador totally out of the blue: "The world shall drown in innocent blood if George W Bush comes to power."[73]
>
> Logical and scholarly arguments have established that in the 81st year of Pakistan's [existence] the crescent-and-green flag shall fly over New Delhi. Likes of the events that happened in the first six years [of Islam] in Medinah have already happened here, but what in Medinah took one year, has required a decade in Pakistan...The Battle of Badr took place in the second year of Hijra; here the war of September [1965] occurred in Pakistan's second decade. [Badr] happened 17 months after Hijrat; our war occurred 17 years after the nation's birth.[74]
>
> I asked [Sarfaraz Shah], "Do you say these things just to give people some courage? For what is evident in Pakistan is most disheartening." He replied, "Nature has a system and a design that are always visible to our eyes. But there is also a Will of Nature (sic). Intellectuals and analysts come to their conclusions by observing the System. But *faqirs* see the Will of Nature too, and according to it, *inshallah*, Pakistan will be a dominant power in coming years. Its time to rise again has come."[75]

One may not find counterparts of the above in the pages of *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, but an hour's channel surfing on cable TV in the US would remove any delusion that religious phantasmagoria has disappeared in the "Enlightened" world. It would also confirm that "prophecies" come useful to the powerful too. St John's "Revelations", Shah Ni'matullah Wali's "Prophetic Poems", Nostradamus' "Divinations" – they are here to stay, and will not go away any time soon. Far too many human frailties find refuge in them, and too many human ambitions draw nourishment from their words.

NOTES

1 *Times of India* (30 December 2009).

2 In the Urdu daily, *Express*, 13 January 2010, under the heading, "*Bisat Ulatne-wali Hai*" ("Tables Will Soon Be Turned"), available at: http://express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx? newsID = 1100824662&Issue=NP_LHE& Date= 20100113. Last viewed on 26 March 2011.

3 See his website "Brasstacks": http://www.brasstacks.pk/.

4 Available at: http://www.jang.com.pk/jang/mar2010-daily/29-03-2010/col4.htm. Last viewed on 26 March 2011.

5 In *Quest* (Bombay), #94 (March-April 1975); included in my *Ambiguities of Heritage* (Karachi 1999), 123-42, also available at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/ mealac/ pritchett/ oolitlinks/naim/ambiguities/14muslimpress.html.

6 For an excellent analysis of the Zaid Hamid phenomenon, see "Pakistan's New Paranoia", by Manan Ahmed in *The National* (Abu Dhabi), 11 March 2010, available at: http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100311/REVIEW/703119992/1008. Last viewed on 26 March 2011.

7 E G Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol 3, (Cambridge 1956), 465-70.

8 *Shabistan* (New Delhi), June 1972, 120-35; Qamar Islampuri, *Hazrat Ni'matullah Wali aur Unka Asli Qasidah* (Lahore 1973), 59-67. The version in Mirza Ziauddin Beg's *Ahwal wa Asar-i-Hazrat Shah Ni'matullah Wali Kirmani* (Karachi 1975), contains 57 verses. In south Asia, the three poems are invariably published with Urdu commentaries.

9 Anonymous, *Peshgo'i-i-Shah Ni'matullah Wali dar bara-i-Auza'-i-Iran wa Zuhur-i-Hazrat-i-Mihdi* (np, nd), 5-8. In the authoritative edition of the Shah's poetry published by Jawad Nurbakhsh (*Kulliyat-i-Ash'ar-i-Shah Ni'matullah Wali*; Tehran 1379?), the poem has 56 couplets.

10 It was already happening in 1888; see Browne, *Literary History*, 465.

11 The serial appearance of Dajjal, Mahdi, and Jesus is integral to the accepted scenario for the end of the world among the Muslims.

12 The shortest version is in Khwaja Hasan Nizami, *Hazrat Imam Mahdi* (Delhi 1940), 69-74. The longest version – *Shabistan* (New Delhi), May 1972, 115-45 – has a basic text of 37 plus three additional couplets from one of the three cited manuscripts.

13 *Shabistan*, May 1972, 117, 131-35, 138-42. The title of the unsigned article translates: "Eight Hundred Years Old Prophecies: Islamic Rule in India Will Last for 40 Years".

14 Literally, "I was a treasure". The reference is to a *hadith-i-qudsi* – non-Qur'anic words of God as reported by the Prophet – that the Sufis greatly favour: "I was a hidden treasure and wished to be known. Hence I created the universe." Incidentally, the *abjad* or numerical value of the first two words of the original Arabic – *kuntu kanzan* – comes to 548. Taken as a Hijri date it would be equivalent to 1153-54 AD.

15 Islampuri, *Hazrat*, 7. Islampuri mentions an accompanying Urdu translation and later provides one (62-67), without making it clear if it was the same.

16 Shah Isma'il, a man of learning, wrote in Arabic and Persian on theological and mystical topics; their Urdu translations are still in print. Useful studies of the movement are: Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahabi Movement in India* (New Delhi, 1994, reprint); Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, *Sirat-i-Syed Ahmad Shahid* (Lucknow 1939); and the three books by Ghulam Rasul Mihr: *Syed Ahmad Shahid*, 2 Vols (Lahore 1952), *Jama'at-i-Mujahidin* (Lahore 1955), and *Sarguzisht-i-Mujahidin* (Lahore 1956).

17 A book with that title, however, was held in high regard in Shah Isma'il's circle. Muhammad Ja'far Thanesari – he was sentenced to the Andaman Islands in 1864 for being a "Wahhabi" conspirator – listed it among the books he wished his sons to read with due care. See the English translation of Thanesari's *Nasa'ih-i-Ja'fari* (ms dated 1278 AH), included in "Papers Connected with the Trial of Moulvie Ahmedoollah of Patna and Others for Conspiracy and Treason", in *Selections from Records of the Bengal Government*, No XLII (Calcutta 1866), 147. The title is badly transcribed as *Usbveenfi Ahwul Mohtadin*.

18 Islampuri, *Hazrat*, 10-11. He missed the full significance of the note when he mistook it to be by Shah Isma'il. Regrettably, he then insinuated that the poem was taken to Iran and deliberately ascribed to the Shah of Kirman – by the Baha'is!

19 The movement's infrastructure survived the debacle of 1831. A Maulana Badi'uzzaman of Burdwan, for example, is reported to have published many booklets, including one entitled *Peshingoyi-i-Shah Ni'matullah Sahib* ("The Prophecy of Shah

Ni'matullah Sahib"). See Syed Muhammad Miyan, *'Ulama-i-Hind ka Shandar Mazi*, Vol 3 (Delhi 1957), 27.

20 (1) "A Sketch of the Wahhabis in India Down to the Death of Sayyid Ahmad in 1831", *Calcutta Review*, # 100, April 1870, 73-104; (2) "The Wahhabis in India, No II", *Calcutta Review*, # 101, July 1870, 177-92; (3) "Wahhabis in India, No III", *Calcutta Review*, # 102, October 1870, 381-99.

21 *Calcutta Review*, April 1870, 100-01. The number and serial order of the translated couplets are identical to the version in Islampuri. The article's author had access to at least one other version of Q1, for he highlighted two discrepancies by referring to some "original poem". While rightly noting that the changes enhanced the "Wahhabi" cause, he failed to note the discrepant dates for the alleged poets.

22 Translator's footnote: "The original poem gives 750 Hijra. The fabrication was made to suit the birth of Sayyid Ahmad."

23 I have used the second edition (London 1872).

24 For example, the first line in his version – "I see the power of God – I see distress in the world" – is a combination of lines 1 and 5 in the article. ibid, 63.

25 Syed Ahmad Khan first wrote a long review in *The Pioneer* (Allahabad), then published it as a small book in 1872 with some additional material: Syed Ahmad Khan Bahadur CSI , *Review on Dr Hunter's Indian Mussalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel Against the Queen?* (Lahore, nd, reprint).

26 *Akhbar-al-Akhyar* (Lahore 1962), an account exclusively of Indian Sufis by Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis written in 1000 A H (1591-92 AD), lists no Ni'matullah. *Gulzar-i-Abrar* (Lahore, 1395 AH) by Muhammad Ghausi Shattari, completed in 1022 AH (1613 AD), mentions two Sufis of that name, but no prophetic poem. Syed Athar Abbas Rizvi, in his exhaustive *A History of Sufism in India* (New Delhi 1983), mentions only one Indian Ni'matullah, but again no prophecies.

27 *Selections from Records of the Bengal Government*, No XLII (Calcutta 1866), 150-52.

28 Ibid, 144, 152. He refers to other versions, but gives no details.

29 *Calcutta Review*, No 102, October 1870, 386-87. The several little changes are indeed improvements, but no acknowledgment is made of the original.

30 Hunter, *Indian Musalmans*, 64.

31 Khan, *Review*, 31-32. He underscores his argument by citing the Qur'an (7:188). With reference to another "prophetic" work – *Asar-i-Mahshar* by Moulavi Muhammad Ali – Khan wrote, "Learned Mahomedan divines have no faith in [such books], and I deem them as true as any modern sensational novel (34)".

32 My search turned up no notable Kashmiri Sufi named Ni'matullah. Khwaja Muhammad A'zam Diddimiri (d 1765) mentions three Sufis of that name, but does not ascribe either prophetic or poetic talent to any. See *Waqi'at-i-Kashmir*, tr Shamsuddin Ahmad (Srinagar 2001).

33 Anjuman-i-Taraqqi-i-Urdu (Pakistan), Karachi, manuscript no 3/694, "*Sharh-i-Qasidah-i-Shah Ni'matullah Wali*". Arguably, it was written in 1884, the year Mir Mahbub Ali Khan became the Nizam in his own right. The poem also mentions Abdul Hamid of Turkey, who was deposed in 1909.

34 Mir Mahbub Ali Khan died in 1911. For some obscure reason, the author also claims that the Shah of Kerman was a Shi'ah at birth but became a Sunni in mature age inspired by a dream.

35 The Raza Library at Rampur has a copy of Q2 (37 couplets) bound with another book titled *Nisab-i-Turki* by Khwaja Amir Khan (Catalogue number: 2563 *fe*). Both were copied in 1273 AH (1856-57 AD). The copy of Q2 describes its original as "published at the Jamil-al-Matabi' of Saiyid Jamiluddin Khan". No date or place is mentioned.

36 Khwaja Hasan Nizami, *Kitab-al-Amr ya'ni Imam Mahdi ke Ansar aur un ke Fara'iz* (Meerut 1913). The number of Nizami's books, booklets, and pamphlets is undetermined; they were often reprints with changed names.

37 For more on the Sanusis, see Russell McGuirk, *The Sanusi's Little War: The Amazing Story of a Forgotten Conflict in the Western Desert, 1915-17* (London 2007).

38 It probably contained some "revelation" about the Kaiser's secret conversion to Islam, which was much rumoured then on account of the facial resemblance between him and the Afghan Crown Prince, Amanullah Khan – both sported upswept moustaches. Likewise, the neatly bearded George V was believed by many to be a secret Muslim. I heard these speculations recalled by an uncle as youthful follies.

39 Khwaja Hasan Nizami, *Hazrat Imam Mahdi ke Zuhur ki Khabren aur Basharaten* (Delhi: 1940, second printing), 34-35. The full title reads: "The news and prophecies concerning the appearance of Hazrat Imam Mahdi, who shall remove blood-shedding from the world and bring about the Divine rule of Peace and Love, gathered by Khwaja Hasan Nizami of Delhi from well-established and reliable books of the Hindus, Parsis, Christians, and Muslims". Inside, Nizami asks his readers to buy at least five copies to distribute among friends. Elsewhere, he declares that the first printing of five thousand copies had sold out in one month: "Though the cost per copy had been one anna [i e, 1/16th of a rupee] I had charged only one paisa [1/64th]. Now I intend to charge two annas per copy to make up for the loss (97-98)."

40 Nizami, *Kitab-al-Amr*, 41-42. Nizami insists that the "Fifth" was King George V of Great Britain, and not Sultan Muhammad Rishad V of Turkey. He writes ecstatically, "May God soon bring the day when our glorious king stands up with the Islamic banner in his hand, and we, his loyal soldiers, plunge into enemy lines, with British flags in our hands and the cry of '*Allah-o-Akbar*' on our lips".

41 Nizami, *Hazrat Imam Mahdi*, 63-64.

42 The two are usually identified in other publications as Syed Ahmad Khan, the eminent reformer, and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the _ Ahmadia sect.

43 Nizami, *Hazrat Imam Mahdi*, 68.

44 Nizami implies that he had published the poems in some form. My only aunt had a copy from those days but for some reason she never let me see it.

45 Islampuri, *Hazrat*, 26-31. It appeared in a book entitled *Ta'limat-i-Jadidah par ek Nazar* ("A Glance at New Teachings"), Amritsar, 1931. Unfortunately, Islampuri does not provide the authors name.

46 Incidentally, as Q3 gains in length the quality of its language declines, reflecting the rapid neglect of Persian language in south Asia in the 20th century.

47 One verse even stipulated an amazing alliance between the Iranians, the Afghans, and the "Dakinis" for the conquest of India.

48 Ibid, 42-46. The editorial pointed out, for example, how a couplet once interpreted as referring to a king was now taken to imply the Quaid-i-Azam.

49 Ibid, 46-48.

50 *Ma'arif* (Azamgarh), Vol 61, No 2 (February 1948), 143-48. The article is signed "Re", which, Professor Zilli tells me, stood for Riyasat Ali Nadvi. The article opens: "We have received queries about this *qasidah* by Shah Ni'matullah Wali from several people. It shows that Muslims are increasingly seeking help in such prophecies these days, to the extent even of forging and publishing new poems in his name…." The author's conclusive argument is that the word "Japan", used in the poem, did not exist in the Shah's times.

51 Islampuri, *Hazrat*, 57.

52 *Shabistan*, February 1972, 117-43; *Jam'iat Times*, 18, 25 February and 3 March 1972.

53 Muhammad Manzur Nu'mani, "*Shah Ni'matullah Wali aur Unka Qasidah*" ("Shah Ni'matullah Wali and His Qasidah"), in *Aza'im* (Lucknow), 21 March 1972, 10-11.

54 Hasan Sani Nizami, "*Musalmanon ke Gham aur unka 'ilaj*" ("The Sorrows of the Muslims and their Cure"), in *Aza'im*, 28 March 1972, 10-11. He, however, reprinted the two poems his father had published three decades earlier – "to help contemporary readers come to their own conclusions".

55 *Shabistan*, April 1972, 125-45. Curiously, the editors suggested that the language of Q3 showed its author was an Afghan or Pathan, and not an Iranian.

56 *Shabistan*, May 1972, 115-45.

57 The four articles contained Persian verses with Urdu commentaries. Several readers wrote back, excoriating the errors in both the texts and the commentaries. In response, the editors twice published the same letter from someone who praised them for "bringing to light rare gems" and "awakening Indian Muslims from deep slumber".

58 "*Shah Ni'matullah Wali Ki Peshgo'iyan*" ("The Prophecies of Shah Ni'matullah Wali"), in *Chatan* (Lahore), 10 January 1972, 12-13; Ehsan Qureshi Sabiri, "*Haqiqat-i-Hal Kya Hai*" ("What the Truth Is"), ibid, 13.

59 It contains a selection of reviews, the earliest dated September-October 1972.

60 The most useful account is in Yoginder Sikand, *Pseudo-Messianic Movements in Contemporary Muslim South Asia* (New Delhi 2008), 13-58.

61 See Mufti Rashid Ahmad, *Bher ki Surat men Bheriya ya'ni Dindar Anjuman* ("A Wolf in the Guise of a Sheep, i e, the Deendar Anjuman"), (Karachi 1976).

62 *Du'a-Nama Pesh-i-Khidmat A'la Hazrat Shah Zahir Shah* (Karachi n d), p 22. It also mentions a dream that Khwaja Hasan Nizami purportedly had in 1911, in which he saw the Prophet in an Afghan outfit (also mentioned in Nizami, *Shaikh Sanusi* 14). The petition was apparently ill received. My copy has a hand-written marginal note, describing the rulers of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia – all acclaimed in the original text – as "tied to the testicles of [Lyndon B] Johnson and [Alexey] Kosygin". Another note urges the reader to reprint and distribute the pamphlet, but make sure to include the marginal remark.

63 Habibullah Shah, *Haqiqat-i-Qiyam-i-Pakistan ba-tausiq-i-Bisharat* (New Karachi 1971), 88 pages. Henceforward, *Bisharat*. The inside title adds, "As prophesied in the Qur'an and by the Prophet and Muslim saints, and by the elders of the Hindus". It is one of the acknowledged sources – more likely, the main source – for Zaid Hamid's version of Q3, as will be shown later.

64 *Bisharat*, 73.

65 Ghulam-e-Muhammad Khair-ul-Bashar Farooqi, *Crusade?* (Faisalabad 2003). Its tenth chapter (203-26) is devoted to Q3. The author calls himself a journalist and an author.

66 Farooqi, *Crusade?*, 202-03. Farooqi makes no mention of the Anjuman, but his version of Q3 is a mix of *Bisharat*'s 2nd and 3 poems. He reports getting the English version of the *Protocols* from a retired Wing Commander!

67 Ibid, 220. The *Bisharat* version has *ikram* ("bounty"), perhaps a misreading of bad poetry.

68 The quality of the translators' English is as bad as their knowledge of Persian. Most depressing was their interpretation of the verse concerning the "two Ahmads": "Two persons named Ahmed will mislead people to a [great] extent by misinterpretation of the Holy Quran. (Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani.)" The last time Sir Syed was so vilified was in the 19th century.

69 Hamid calls himself a "defense analyst". His website displays a section devoted to the Ni'matullahi prophecies. There are also eight video commentaries. http://www.brasstacks.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=187%3Anaimatulla-shah-wali&catid= 39%3 Avideos& lang =en. Last viewed on 26 March 2011.

70 Amazingly, Hamid twice claims that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (d 1948) would convert to Islam. One must give him credit, however, for not naming Sir Syed as one of the "two Ahmads".

71 Hamid's reputation seems to have gone into some decline. He was accused of heresy and conspiracy to commit murder in April 2010, and has had to face much ridicule in several English dailies and blogs.

72 Khan, *Review*, 32. He concluded with a vehement personal declaration: "I deem [the messianic traditions] as true as any modern sensational novel (34)".

73 Haroonur Rasheed, "*Kya Parhez 'Ilaj se Behtar Nahin?*" ("Is Preventing An Illness Not Better Than Treating It?") in *Jang* (Karachi), 29 March 2010. (http://www.jang.com.pk/jang/mar2010-daily/29-03-2010/col4.htm) Last viewed on 26 March 2011.

74 Muhammad Ibrahim Azmi, Advocate, "*Hijrat ki Takmil*" ("The Fulfilment of Hijrat"), in *Daily Express* (Lahore), 1 April 2010. (http://express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow. aspx? newsID= 1100 898802&Issue=NP_LHE&Date=20100401) Last viewed on 26 March 2011.

75 Muhammad Amir Khakwani, "*Sufi*", in *Daily Express* (Lahore), 26 April 2010. (http://express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID =1100923147&Issue=NP_LHE&Date=20100426) Last viewed on 26 March 2011.