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ISLAMIC APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE AND EXTREMISM: CONTEXTUAL READING OF HADITHS ON THE MAHDI WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Like any other religious community, the apocalyptic literature in Muslim society has become a source of pessimism instead of optimism. The extremists who conducted a series of suicide attacks on religious places and hotels in Sri Lanka in 2019 justified their violent activities, referring to apocalyptic literature that prophesied the advance of Mahdi. These extremists misunderstood the hadiths on the Mahdi and intended to create instability in the world to accelerate his coming to resolve the present issues of Muslims. This research studied the relevant hadiths quoted by the extremists to kill innocent people and explored their meaning. The contextual analysis method has been employed to extract the meaning of these hadiths. This research shows that the extremists have misinterpreted these hadiths and used the Islamic apocalyptic literature out of context. The socio-political context of the usage of these hadiths further elaborates the change that has taken place in the understanding of their purpose throughout history. Therefore, this research recommends that Muslim religious and social leaders review interpretation traditions and educate young people to adopt socio-political and historical contexts to understand Islamic apocalyptic literature, mainly hadiths, to protect young people from extremism and radicalism.

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1. Introduction

Apocalypse is the disclosure of something hidden in the future.[4] Thus the literature on this topic describes the signs and events that would occur at the end of the world. Generally, it appeals to those who feel the world's injustice, oppression, and disenfranchisement.[5] Apocalyptic literature is common to all religions, including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism.[6] The source of apocalyptic literature is usually scriptures or the teachings of the founder of a religion.

Many Hindu scholars have discussed the apocalypse in Hinduism, particularly with reference to Kali Yuga (Kali Age). Aryabhata (476–550 CE), the Indian mathematician who wrote the Sanskrit treatise *Surya Siddhanta*, Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri (1855 – 1936), and many others have written about these prophecies. According to the Hindu literature, the apocalypse discusses the natural ending of the world in the fourth age, the Kali Age. It is said that Vishnu will appear again as Kalki, a white horse destined to destroy the present world and take humanity to a different, higher plane. All kings occupying the earth in the Kali Age will be wanting in tranquillity, strong in anger, indulging in sensual pleasure, lying and dishonesty, inflicting death on women, children, and cows, prone to take the paltry possessions of others, with the character that is mostly vial, rising to power and soon falling.[7]

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[4] C. C Torrey, "Apocalypse," *The Jewish Encyclopaedia,* edited by Isidore Singer (1906), 669–675.

[5] Global Security, "Apocalypse in Islam", *Global Security Org,* July 15, 2020. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-apocalyptic.htm

[6] Nuru Mohammed, *Concept of Mahdi in Early Shia Authorship.* Doctoral dissertation, submitted to the Middlesex University, 2016, 3, July 15, 2020. https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DISSERTATION-NURU.pdf

[7] Van Hollen and Cecilia Coale, *Cancer and the Kali Yuga: Gender, Inequality, and Health in South India* (US: University of California Press, 2022), 16.

The apocalyptic literature in Jewish history began earlier than 168 BCE and flourished until I32 CE. The Maccabean struggle closed with the uprising under Hadrian. It appeared in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in Isaiah, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, and Joel, and continued to grow both in the synagogue and the Christian church.[8] The coming of a Jewish Messiah (Moshiach), a leader who descended from the Davidic line, and who will rule the people of united tribes of Israel (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5) will herald the Messianic Age of global peace. The law of the Jubilee will be reinstated. This belief, therefore, has become one of the Articles in *Shloshah-Asar Ikkarim*, The Thirteen Articles of Faith.[9] Jewish scholars have studied the detailed development of this concept in their history.[10]

However, the concept of the Messiah in Christianity is different from that in Judaism. The Messiah in Christianity is the Son of God. The Gospel, according to Mark, begins with the sentence "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1). The Gospel, according to Matthew, identifies Jesus as the Messiah and as the Son of God: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matthew 16:16). The Christians designated the second coming of Jesus as Christ and believed that the messianic prophecies in the Old Testaments would be fulfilled in his mission and resurrection.

In Buddhism, apocalypse literature discusses the coming of Maitreya Buddha. He will appear on the earth, achieve complete enlightenment, and teach the pure Dharma. "At that period, brethren, there will arise in the world an Exalted One named Maitreya, Fully Awakened, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, an Exalted One, a Buddha, even as I am now. He, by himself, will thoroughly know and see, as it

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[8] John W. Bailey, "Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," *The Biblical World* 25, no. 1 (1905): 30–42.

[9] Aaron Milavec, *Salvation is from the Jews (John 4: 22): Saving Grace in Judaism and Messianic Hope in Christianity* (Liturgical Press, 2007), 122.

[10] John W. Bailey, "Jewish Apocalyptic Literature."

were face to face, this universe, with Its worlds of the spirits, Its Brahmas and Its Maras, and Its world of recluses and Brahmins, of princes and peoples, even as I now, by myself, thoroughly know and see them" (*Digha Nikaya*, 26). This passage explains the coming of another Buddha, Maitreya, who would appear and introduce different Dhamma. Although this prophecy is ambiguous, other prophecies explain the time of Maitreya Buddha in detail. "After my decease, first will occur the five disappearances. Moreover, what are the five disappearances? The disappearance of attainments (to Nirvana), the disappearance of the method (inability to practice wisdom, insight and the four purities of moral habit), the disappearance of learning (loss of men who follow the Dharma), the disappearance of the symbols (the outward forms, the robes, and practices of Buddhism), the disappearance of the relics...after 5000 years" (*The Surangama Sutra*).

Islamic sources also have many apocalyptic materials. There are some in the Qur'an, but mainly in Hadith literature. Although the Second Coming of Isa or Jesus in Islamic literature is an end-time event, it is not considered conclusive. Instead, the beginning of the end times is marked by the appearance of Mahdi and Dajjal, the Antichrist.[11] Hence, Muslims expect at least three prominent individuals to appear in the End Times: (1) The Mahdi (the rightly guided), (2) Dajjal or Antichrist, and (3) the Prophet Isa or Jesus.

From the above discussion, it is apparent that most world religions have apocalyptic literature that prophecies the coming of a just leader and the introduction of just rule in the world. However, descriptions of him and the situation in which he appears according to the different religions are not precise since they use images, symbols, mystic numbers, and forms of animals.

Due to its imprecision, religious fanatics and radicals use this apocalyptic literature to attract innocent people to their cause. Harold Camping's Y2K issue, the End of the Mayan Calendar, and Atomic Scientists' The Doomsday Clock are examples of radicals' interpretation of apocalyptic literature. *The Journal of Religions* published a special issue under the theme "Apocalypticism in the 21st

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[11]Global Security, "Apocalypse in Islam", *Global Security Org,* July 15, 2020. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-apocalyptic.htm.

Century" in 2019 (10) and collected views of different religions on apocalyptic literature. There is enough literature that explains the way of using this literature by radicals and religious fanatics.[12] Oxford University has published a handbook on apocalyptic literature and explained how the radicals exploit this literature in 28 chapters.[13] Our present article investigates the Muslim extremists' understanding of the advent of Mahdi and the way of exploiting Islamic apocalyptic literature to justify their violent activities in Sri Lanka.

2. Background of Study

As mentioned before, Muslim extremists use Islamic apocalyptic literature to motivate young people towards violence. They propagate the idea that they are living at the End of Days. They can expect their Messiah, the Mahdi, on earth at any moment and establish *Dawlah Islamiyah* (global Islamic kingdom).[14] They also believe that Jesus will return not as the Saviour or Son of God but as a lieutenant to the Mahdi to beat *Dhajjal,* the Islamic version of Antichrist. The extremist groups also try to convince young Muslims to believe that the awaited Mahdi will appear only when the world is immersed in turmoil. Thus, as they see it, the primary duty of Muslims is to create chaos in the world.[15] This shows that Islamic apocalypticism has been used as a powerful means to motivate young people towards violence and extremism.[16]

The coming of Mahdi is an essential issue used by extremists

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[12] John J. Collins, "Radical Religion and the Ethical Dilemmas of Apocalyptic Millenarianism," *Radical Christian Voices and Practice: Essays in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 87–102.

[13] John J. Collins, "Radical Religion and the Ethical Dilemmas of Apocalyptic Millenarianism."

[14] Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, "ISIS and the deceptive rebooting of al-Qaeda," *GCSP Policy Paper (2014)*, 1–5. July 23, 2020. https://mideast-africa.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/mideast_africa/%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A8/Mohamedou%20ISIS%20and%20the%20Deceptive%20Rebooting%20of%20Al%20Qaeda.pdf

[15] Mustafa Ajyol, "The problem with the Islamic apocalypse," *The New York Time*s, October 03, 2016, August 05, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/04/opinion/the-problem-with-the-islamic-apocalypse.html.

[16] Ibid.

to recruit and intoxicate young Muslims. Zahran, the leader of ISIS attackers in Sri Lanka on April 21, 2019, exploited *hadiths* on Mahdi to effectively convince his followers to become zealots. He promised them Islamic supremacy on earth based on these *hadiths* and motivated them to sacrifice their lives.[17] As an example, a suicide bomber sent his last message to his wife, who also killed herself following these attacks, as follows:

> *"The time to come is going to be hard not only for my family, but also for the whole Muslim community of Sri Lanka. The reason being – and this is the command of Allah, this is how it is going to start because al-Mahdi 'alayhi as-salam will not appear just like that. For al-Mahdi 'alayhi as-salam to appear, it will be a devastating situation where the Muslim Ummah will be eagering for leadership, and everyone is suffering. Everyone is suffering oppression, tyranny, and façade. All this would be happening when al-Mahdi 'alayhi as-salam has to come when he has to appear; it will be a devastating situation, so, you know, at that particular point he will appear and inshallah he will lead the Ummah. But for that time, the one who is prepared to accept him will be the ones who are accepting him. At the same time, there will be a majority of the Muslim Ummah who will be accepting Dhajjal because he will be more attractive to them than al-Mahdi 'alayhi as-salam."[18]*

This message reflects Muslim extremists' understanding of the Mahdi and its role in radicalizing young Muslims. According to this message, the suicide bomber justified his unethical and brutal killing of innocent people with *hadiths* that prophesied the establishment of the supremacy of Islam by the awaited Mahdi. He believed that killing people and creating unprecedented chaos would accelerate the coming of the Mahdi. According to him, the Mahdi will not appear

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[17] Rohan Gunaratna. "Audio recording of extremist' suspect," Criminal Investigations Department, Sri Lanka. March 15, 2020 (unpublished document).
[18] Ibid.

until mayhem reigns supreme. Having been systematically indoctrinated, the Islamic State ideologues believe that Armageddon will come in their lifetime.

Of the three prominent individuals to appear in the End Times according to the hadith literature, the advent of the Mahdi is the most popular belief in Muslim history. Since 1979, *hadiths* on the advent of the Mahdi have become more popular among Muslim youths. According to PEW research (2012), half of Muslims in nine Muslim-majority countries believe that the coming of the Mahdi is "imminent" and could happen in their lifetime.[19]

The biography of the Mahdi has been written with precise, detailed descriptions before his birth, as revealed in *hadiths*, such as, "The Mahdi is of my lineage, with a high forehead and a long, thin, curved nose. He will fill the earth with fairness and justice as it was filled with oppression and injustice, and he will rule for seven years" (Abu Dawud: 4265; Haakim: 4/557). This detailed description of the Mahdi and his arrival made some Muslim scholars suspect the authenticity of these hadiths and the coming of the Mahdi.

Scholars among Sunnis like Ibn Khaldun hardly paid attention to the *hadiths* on the Mahdi. Although other Sunni scholars accepted the coming of the Mahdi as a sign of the Last Day, almost none of them included him in the list of ten big signs of the Last Day. It shows that Sunni scholars did not consider him a vital sign of the Last Day despite accepting the prophecy on the emergence of the Mahdi.

Despite the Islamic apocalyptic literature describing the Mahdi as one of the three individuals to appear on the Last Day, early Islamic tradition, particularly the Prophet and his companions, did not give particular attention to the coming of the Mahdi. This might be a reason for Sunni scholars' lukewarm position on the advent of the Mahdi. However, the coming of the Mahdi is vital among the Shia. Shia scholars like Kulaini's al-Kafi, Tusi's Ghaybah, Numani's Ghaybah, and Saduq's Kamal al-Din have shown great interest in the

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[19] Pew Research, "The world's Muslims: unity and diversity." *Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project*, 2012, June 20, 2020. https://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-3-articles-of-faith/

advent of the Mahdi and included it as one of the five articles in their belief system.[20]

It is clear that belief in the advent of the Mahdi plays an essential role in Islamic eschatology. Since this belief can have a significant socio-political and psychological impact on Muslim society, extremist groups take full advantage of this literature.[21] This research, therefore, examines the validity of the extremists' claim that it is legitimate to create violence and chaos with the view of fulfilling the prophecy of the advent of the Mahdi.

3. Research Method and Focus

3.1. *Theoretical Foundation*

As far as this research examines the religious texts, mainly the texts of *hadiths* on Mahdi, authentication of these *hadiths* is crucial before examining their meanings. There are two methods to ensure the authenticity of a hadith: the study of its *isnad* and the study of its *matan*.[22] *Isnad* means the chain of people transmitting a hadith from the Prophet (ﷺ) to the hadith experts who recorded it in written form. The science that studies the authenticity of *isnad* is called *usul al-hadith* (the sources of hadith).[23] This study determines the quality of a hadith from the perspective of the trustworthiness of the narrator (*rawi* – pl *ruwwat*) and the number of narrators in an *isnad*. Examining the *isnad* based on the number of narrators in a transmission chain involved categorizing the narrators in accordance with their generation (*tabaqat*) and confirming their numbers. Hence, hadith experts classified people involved in *isnad* under four *tabaqat*:

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[20] Nuru Mohammed, *Concept of Mahdi in Early Shia Authorship*. Doctoral dissertation, submitted to the Middlesex University, 2016, 3, July 15, 2020. https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DISSERTATION-NURU.pdf

[21] Barend Louwrens Prinsloo, "The etymology of "Islamic extremism": A misunderstood term?" *Cogent Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1-8 (Article:1463815).

[22] Tuan Mohd Sapuan, Tuan Rohaizan Baru, Ahmad Fauzi Hassan, Ahmad Zahid Bin Salleh, and Mohd Fauzi Mohd Amin, "The *matan* and *sanad* criticisms in evaluating the hadith," *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 21 (2014): 152-159

[23] Ibid.

(i) The direct companions of the Prophet (*sahabah*), (ii) the children of *sahabah* (tabi'in), (iii) grandchildren of *sahabah* (*taba' al-tabi'in*), and (iv) Imams who recorded the hadith in written form. The experts categorized a hadith based on the number of narrators in *isnad* as either *mutawatir* or *ahad*. *Mutawati*r means a hadith with more than ten different *isnad* or more than ten narrators in each *tabaqat*. Ahad means a hadith that has only one narrator in any of the *tabaqat*.

Hadith experts studied ahad hadiths from the perspective of the trustworthiness of the narrator to confirm its authenticity. After a detailed analysis of the character and biographic investigation of every individual involved in the transmission chain, the experts categorize their narration of a hadith under four levels of authenticity: *sahih* (very authentic), *hasan* (authentic), *da'if* (weak) and *munkar* (unauthentic).

Hadith experts do not feel satisfied with the use of *isnad* analysis alone to confirm the authenticity of a hadith; instead, they use content criticism (*naqd al-matan* since it helps the experts to ascertain the status of a narrator, whether he is accepted or rejected, trustworthy or otherwise, carefully safeguards the hadith or is forgetful. [24] Indeed, content criticism is one of the significant counterarguments against Western criticism of Hadith.[25]

Content criticism studies hadith texts critically by comparing the *matan* of one hadith narrator with the *matan* of other narrators, including views from the logical aspect. Hence, hadith experts would look for incongruous, contradictory mistakes before confirming the authenticity of hadiths.[26]

Referring to hadiths on the Mahdi, many hadith scholars have confirmed their authenticity from the perspective of *isnad*. For example, Shawkani (1753-1839 CE) confirmed the their authenticity in his treatise entitled *The Explanation Showing the Accounts about*

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Salahudheen Kozhithod, "Khaldunian techniques of historical criticism and their place in modern debates on *naqd al-matan* (content criticism) of hadith," *İbn Haldun Çalışmaları Dergisi* 3, no. 2 (2018): 225-238.

[26] Tuan Mohd Sapuan, Tuan Rohaizan Baru, Ahmad Fauzi Hassan, Ahmad Zahid Bin Salleh, and Mohd Fauzi Mohd Amin. "The *matan* and *sanad* criticisms in evaluating the hadith."

the Mahdi, Dhajjal, and the Messiah.[27]

In terms of content criticism, most hadith experts confirmed their authenticity. However, these hadiths raised the possibility of them being considered as conveying the meaning of Mahdi as a general term in the Qur'an that refers to anyone who accepts *al-Haqq* (Absolute truth) and lived in accordance with the Truth.[28] Some hadith experts accept these hadiths not only as *sahih* (sound) but also *mutawatir matan*.[29] Shawkani, for example, considers them as *mutawatir*.[30] In *Fathul Bari*, Ibn Hajar (1372-1449 CE) also considered the hadiths on the Mahdi and the descent of Isa as *mutawatir* in terms of meaning.[31]

3.2. **Conceptual Framework**

To the extent that these hadiths are authentic, their meaning and objective should be understood from the contextual analysis. Since Muslim extremists have used these hadiths to motivate violence among young people, a critical analysis of them these is crucial.

The science of interpreting hadiths is known as *sharah al-hadith* (hadith commentary). It deals with the nature and meaning of terms used in hadiths, their cultural contexts, types of expression, and occasion of the expression. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi mentioned that *sharah al-hadith* appeared in Quranic interpretation traditions and developed together with Islamic jurisprudence and the written biography of the Prophet Mohammad (ﷺ).[32] *Sharah al-hadith* emerged as a separate science during the tenth century with the

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[27] Siddiq Khan, *Al-Iza'ah Lima Kana Wa ma Yekunu Baina Yedai al-Sa'ah* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1999), 124.

[28] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, "Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-*sina'ah al-hadithiyyah*: dirasat fi al-'alaqah baina al-tajdid wa al-taqdis," *Journal of Islamiyat al-Ma'arifah* 1, no. 4 (1996): 17-58.

[29] Al-Siddiq Al-Ghumari, *Ibraz al-Wahm al-Maknun* (Damascus: Tariq Publication, 1929), 433–434.

[30] Siddiq Khan, *Al-Iza'ah Lima Kana Wa ma Yekunu Baina Yedai al-Sa'ah* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1999), 124.

[31] Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani, *"Kitab al-jihad wa'l-siyar," Fathul Bari,* vol. 6 (Riyadh: Maktaba Al-Salfiyah, 2008), 570.

[32] Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi, *Al-Jamiah Li Ahlaq al-Rawi Wa Adaab,* 2 (Turkey: Al-Resala Foundation, 1996), 288.

efforts of Al-Khattabi (d. 996 CE) in his commentary on Abi Dawood and Al-Bukhari (810-870 CE) in his *A'lam al-hadith*. Later, al-Tabari (839-923 CE) discussed issues in interpreting hadiths and proposed basic rules in his famous commentary *Tahthib al-Atar Wa tafseel Ma'ani al-Sabith An Rasulillah Min al-Akhbar*.[33] Al-Khattabi wrote a separate guidebook in hadith interpretation, *Ma'alim al-Sunan*.[34] Popular methods of *sharah al-hadith* include (i) explaining a hadith with another hadith, (ii) explaining a hadith with the opinions of the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ), (iii) explaining a hadith with the opinions of *al-tabi'in*; (iv) explaining a hadith with Arabic linguistics and literature, and finally (v) contextual ijtihad-scholastic and hermeneutic rationalization.[35]

Adil Awni (2017) discusses the required academic and professional background of those who would like to interpret hadiths today.[36] According to him, the interpreter must know Arabic linguistic studies (*'ilm al-lugha*), insight into the body of principles and investigative methodologies from the source of law (*usul al-fiqh)*, usage of hadith expertise on the quality of hadiths, Islamic Legal Maxims (*qawa'id al-fiqhiyyah*), the purposes of the Shariah (*maqasid al-shari'ah*), occasion and context of hadiths (*asbab wurūd al-hadith*) as well as the method of referring to scholastic Islamic literature (*turath*).[37] This research focuses on the significance of *maqasid al-shari'ah* and the occasion and context of hadiths in interpreting the hadiths while adopting other relevant requirements.

Hajjee, Ali Khadeer, Jasim and Falah Razzaq discuss the occasion and context of hadith (*asbab wurud al-hadith*) and its importance in understanding the meaning and its implications.[38]

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[33] Al-Dhabi, *Siyar A'alam al-Nubala,* 9th ed., vol. 5, (Beirut: Muassat al-Risalah, 1993), 273.

[34] A'alam Al-Khattabi, Al-*Ḥaḍith,* ed. Abd Al Rahman Aali Saud, vol. 1 (Saudi: Jaami'ah Umm al-Qurah, 1988), 104-105

[35] Diya al-Din Al-Wafi, "*'Ilm sharah al-hadith," Nida al-Hind*., August 05, 2020. http://www.nidaulhind.com/2016/12/blog-post_69.html

[36] Adil Awni, *"Qawa'id al-fiqh al-hadith," Aluka al-Sharaiyyah*., August 02, 2020. https://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/113745/.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ali Khadeer Hajjee and Falah Razzaq Jasim, "*'Ilm warud al-hadith wa atharuhu fi fiqh al-hadith,".Journal of Arabic Language and Literature* 1, no. 18 (2013):

They also have critically studied the rules and regulations for using *asbab wurud* al-*hadith* to articulate the hadith content and contributions of scholars like Balqini, Ibn Hajar, Suyuti, and others. 39

Jurbako, Abdullah Muhammad highlighted the role of *maqasid al-shari'ah* in understanding the hadiths in detail. According to them, *maqasid al-shariah* plays three major roles: (1) elaborating the purpose of a hadith as well as elucidating some terms; (2) eliminating plain contradictions that arise as a result of interference of interest, and (3) the change of Islamic ruling according to changes in time, places, traditions, and situations.[40] Nawawi indicated the importance of *maqasid al-shari'ah* in comprehending hadiths from a moderate perspective, denying the extremist or pessimistic views.[41]

Contemporary Muslim scholars like Ahmad Hassan and Ibrahim Zain (1996) indicated the importance of studying these hadiths from historical, socio-political, and economic perspectives. By virtue of the fact that a sect among Muslims has regarded Mahdi as an article of their belief system, the content of these hadiths need to be explored from the historical and political context.[42] Hence, this research adopts a 'contextualization framework' used to interpret the verses of the Qur'an.[43] To interpret these hadiths in the present living context, we need to focus on *asbab wurud al-hadith* as well as on *maqasid al-shari'ah*. This framework emphasizes history as a source of interpretation of texts. Although the hadiths speak to the

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263-296.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Abdullah Muhammad Jurbako, *"Athar maqasid al-shari'ah fi fiqh al-hadith," Journal of Jamiah al-Shariqah for Shariah and Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018): 27-61.

[41] Nawavi Tabrani, *"Fahm al-sunnah al-nabawiyyah fi daw'I-qawa'id al-maqasid al-sharaiyyah". The Conference E-Proceeding of 3rd INHAD International Muzakarah & Mu'tamar on Hadith (IMAM 2018)*, organized by Hadith Research Institute (INHAD), KUIS. December 27, 2018), April 25, 2020. http://conference. kuis.edu.my/imam/images/eprosiding/2018/ba/3008-imam-2018.pdf.

[42] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-Sina'ah al-hadithiyyah....".*

[43] Mohammad Ismath Ramzy and Simin Ghavifekr. "Women qazi in a minority context: An overview of Sri Lankan Experience," *Societies* 9, no. 1 (2019): 13-22.

immediate community of the Prophet (ﷺ) and communicate within that particular community's socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts to make known its immediate implication, the message in the hadiths is universal and standard for all communities and all times. Therefore, an interpreter of hadiths needs to understand the Prophet's intended meaning, extract it from the nexus of his socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts and explain it to the present socio-political, economic, and cultural context.

Hence, this research studies the content of these hadiths critically adopting contextualization methodology focusing on *asbab wurud al-hadith* as well as *maqasid al-shari'ah*. Hence, the conceptual framework of this research is as follows:
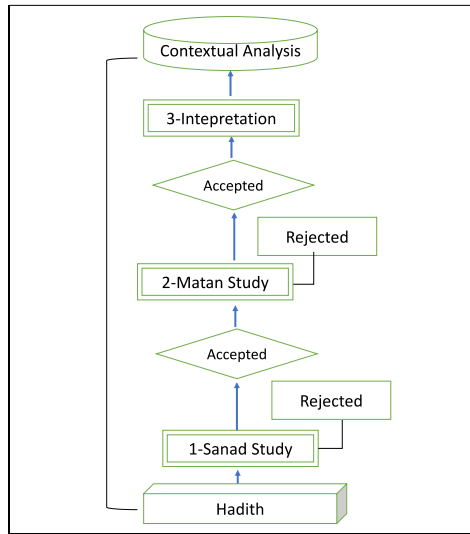
Figure 4. Conceptual framework of contextualization.

Figure 4 explains the process of understanding the hadiths on Mahdi. The study of these hadiths begins with confirming its authenticity. Sanad and Matan's perspectives determine their authenticity. The authenticity of the Mahdi hadiths has been accepted in this research as these met the conditions of *sahih* (sound). The study further proceeded to the second-level verification. Then*, naqd al-hadith* methodology was applied to these hadiths and found them

consistent with each other. Having authenticated these hadiths, we now critically examine their meanings.

As these hadiths discuss the emergence of Mahdi at the end of human history, its meanings need to be understood in the context of the times of the Prophet (ﷺ), and its implications need to be realized in the context of the future. Since the objective of contextual reading of a text is comprehending the text in the present context, the message of the hadiths on Mahdi will be extracted from the context and interpreted into the present context without any change. The extraction will be carried out in the light of maqasid al-shari'ah and asbab wurud al-hadith.

4. Findings and Discussion

The contextual reading of the Mahdi hadiths is found to refute the extremists' claim that these hadiths demand the creation of instability as a way of accelerating the coming of Mahdi. This finding is discussed with reference to two themes: (i) the meaning and the purpose of these hadiths and (ii) the change of purpose over time. As for the meaning and purpose of these hadiths, it will be discussed from four perspectives: weltanschauung of the Qur'an, other hadiths in a chapter, maqasid al-shari'ah, and al-Bukhari's view of the purpose of these hadiths. As for the second theme, it will be discussed in relation to political and religious considerations.

4.1 Meaning and Purpose of these Hadiths

A contextual reading of these hadiths shows that their purpose is to create awareness on fitan – corruptions among people. These hadiths highlight the importance of upholding religious principles and values while avoiding corruption and social misbehaviour. Since corruption and social misbehaviours would lead to fitan or destructions (The Qura'n, 17:4), the Prophet (ﷺ) may have intended to warn the people to stay away from them. This purpose of apocalypse literature, specifically the Mahdi hadiths, could be further explained from the following perspectives.

4.1.1. Purpose of hadiths on the Mahdi from the weltanschauung of the Qur'an

The purpose of the Mahdi hadiths may be further elaborated by reading them in line with the themes of the Qur'an, which may be understood as the primary reading technique of hadiths.[44] Since hadiths explain and detail the Quranic principles, their meanings do not contradict the Qur'an's themes.[45] Since creating awareness of the Truth (*Haqq*) and warning people about falsehood (*batil*) is the essence of the Quranic teachings,[46] hadiths on the Mahdi should also be coherent with this basic Quranic theme. Hence, creating awareness of religiosity (*al-tadayyun*) (manifestation of *Haqq)* and warning people against violence and corruption (*fitan*) (manifestation of batil) would be the core meaning of these hadiths.

4.1.2 *Purpose of the Mahdi Hadiths from Hadith Perspective*

Reading a hadith in conjunction with the themes of other hadiths in a chapter is another method of understanding the purpose of a hadith.[47] From this perspective, the purpose of hadiths on the Mahdi is realized by researchers through creating awareness of religiosity and warning against corruption. Reading such a hadith with a hadith in the apocalyptic chapter in al-Bukhari's compilation (Al-Bukhari: 3449) lucidly illustrates this purpose. Anas (ﷺ), for instance, reported, "Once the people started asking Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) questions, and they asked so many questions that he became angry and ascended the pulpit and said, "I will answer whatever questions you may ask me today." I looked right and left and saw everyone covering his face with his garment and weeping. …And then `Umar got up and said, "We accept Allah as our Lord, and Islam as (our) religion, and Muhammad as (our) Apostle; and we seek refuge with Allah from the afflictions" (Al-Bukhari: 6362). From this incident, it is understood that apocalyptic literature aims to create awareness of religiosity and to warn against corruption. The Prophet (ﷺ) explained some significant Last Day signs to the people. During the

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[44] SharafIlmu Mahmud, *"Mukhtalaf al-hadith: usuluhu wa qawa'iduhu", Journal of Dirasat* 28, no. 2 (2001): 322-337.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-sina'ah al-hadithiyyah…"*.

[47] Ahmed El-Mogtaba Bannga and Haj Abdullah Ismail, *"Manhajiyyat sharah al-hadith: asalah wa muasarah," Journal of al-Tajdeed* 16, no 32 (2012): 159-196.

question-and-answer session, people digressed from this purpose and asked for details of the signs that made the Prophet angry. Realizing the reason for the Prophet's annoyance, Umar (ﷺ) got the people back to the real purpose of the session. He said, "We seek refuge with Allah from the afflictions". It shows that the purpose of hadiths on apocalypses is to create awareness and warning about *fitan*: corruption, distress, chaos, suffering, and conflicts instead of knowing specific details of the Last Day or its signs. Hence, the purpose of the Mahdi hadiths should also be understood within this framework.

4.1.3 Purpose of The Mahadi Hadiths from the Perspective of *Maqasid al-Shariah*

Maqasid al-Shariah is another means of realizing the purpose of hadiths. Preserving public interest (*maslahah*) is the most critical objective of Shariah.[48] According to al-Ghazzali, "The objective of the Shariah is to promote the welfare of human beings, which lies in safeguarding their faith, life, intellect, posterity, and wealth. Whatever ensures the safeguarding of these five fundamentals serves public interest."[49] Muslim scholars generally classify *maqasid al-shari'ah* into three main categories: *daruriyyat* (essentials), *hajiyyat* (needs), and *tahsaniyyat* (embellishments).[50] The category of *daruriyyat* is a vital consideration to ensure the well-being of people in this world as well as the Hereafter, while *hajiyyat* (needs) are complementary to *daruriyyat*.[51] People will find it challenging to attain well-being without *hajiyyat*. The embellishments or *tahsaniyyat* are matters that bestow enhancement in society.[52]

The purpose of the Mahdi hadiths involves the category of

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[48] M. O. Mohamed and A.R. Dzuljastri, "The performance indicators of Islamic Banking from the Maqasid framework," Paper presented at the International Islamic University Malaysia International Accounting Conference (INTAC IV), 2008.

[49] Al-Ghazzali, *Al-Mustasfa min ʾIlm al-Usūl,* vol. 1, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijariyyah al-Kubra, 1937), 139-140.

[50] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariah Made Simple, Revised edition,* (Herdon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought-IIIT, 2008), 134.

[51] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "*Al-Maqasid al-shari'ah*: the objectives of Islamic Law," *Islamic Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 193-208.

[52] Ibid

daruriyyat. This is because *daruriyyat* or the necessary well-being of people in a society will be achieved by five means: (i) preservation of din (religion or religiosity); (ii) preservation of *nafs* (life); (iii) preservation of *nasl* (lineage or procreation); (iv) preservation of mal (property); and (v) preservation of *'aql* (intellect).[53] Since people's religiosity is the primary purpose, the Prophet (ﷺ) has highlighted the importance of religiosity by these hadiths and warned against transgression. Hence, *maqasid al-shari'ah* perspective highlights as the purpose of the Mahdi hadiths the creation of awareness and warning against violence.

4.1.4 Al-Bukhari's view on the purpose of the Mahadi Hadiths

This research gives special consideration to the way of Imam al-Bukhari recorded the Mahadi hadiths. Al-Bukhari recorded apocalyptic hadiths in the chapter titled *Fitan-Affliction or Distress*' instead of in any other chapter. Since Imam al-Bukhari's topics are so unique indicative of his views,[54] this research intends to confirm the purpose of the hadiths on Mahdi based on his views. Imam al-Bukhari has recorded the Mahadi hadiths under the Quranic verse *"beware of an affliction that will not smite exclusively those among you who have done wrong"* (The Qur'an, 8:25). This shows that Imam al-Bukhari has recorded these hadiths to inform people that its purpose is to create awareness on *fitan*, which is about corruptions among people and warning people involved in corruption rather than giving the detail incidents of the Last Day.[55]

Ahmad Ibrahim and Ibrahim Zain also had a similar view, and they said that this intention is apparent among al-Bukhari.[56] For instance, al-Bukhari has recorded the hadith, "I will be at my Lake-Fount (Kauthar) waiting for whoever will come to me. Then, some people will be taken away from me, whereupon I will say, "My followers!" It will be said, "You do not know they turned Apostates

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Hamdan and Sultan, *"Isharat al-Bukhari ila i'ilal al-ahadith min al-khilal tabweebihi fi kitabihi al-sahih,"* Al- Majallah al-Arabiyyah Li Dirasat al-Islamiyah Wa al-Sharaiyyha 5, no.15 (2021): 55-95.

[55] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-sina'ah al-hadithiyyah……."*

[56] Ibid.

as renegades (deserted their religion).”” (Ibn Abi Mulaika said, "Allah, we seek refuge with You from turning on our heels from the (Islamic) religion and from being put to trial") (Al-Bukhari: 7048). This hadith clearly explains the danger of being involved in *fitan*-distress, chaos, and conflict and warns people's involvement in *fitan*.

Ahmad Ibrahim and Ibrahim Zain further elaborated that al-Bukhari creates awareness among people on two types of *fitan* in this chapter: the political conflicts within the Muslim communities and chaos in the Last Hour.[57] To elaborate on the political conflicts, al-Bukhari recorded hadiths like, "A person from among Ansar – the companion of the Prophet who received him when he migrated from Makkah to Madinah-said, "O Messenger of Allah! You appointed such and such person, and why do you not appoint me?" Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "After me, you will see others give preference to you, but you should remain patient till you meet me at the Haud (Al-Kauthar in Jannah)"" (Al-Bukhari: 4330). According to this hadith, the Prophet (ﷺ) advised one of his companions not to be involved in politics, although people found him to be a suitable leader. Therefore, although involvement in politics is necessary, the advice of the Prophet (ﷺ) to this particular person should be understood based on the person's character and context.

The second type of *fitan* is chaos and disorder at the end of the world. Al-Bukhari elaborated on this type of *fitan* in another hadith chapter, "The Day will not be established till the buttocks of the women of the tribe of Daus move while going round Dhi-al-Khalsa." Dhi-al-Khalsa was the idol of the Daus tribe, which they used to worship in the pre-Islamic period (Al-Bukhari: 7116). This hadith prophesies the return of pre-Islamic traditions to Arabia while warning people of deviation. It shows that the purpose of hadiths on the apocalypse is to create awareness on upholding religion and warning on *fitan* that would happen in politics at the end of the world.

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[57] Ibid.

4.2 Change of Purpose in Response to Socio-political and Religious Background

The contextual analysis of hadiths on the Mahdi in this research found that the purpose of these   hadiths has changed over time due to political and religious challenges in the Muslim world. These hadiths contain (i) a description of *fitan* (corruption) and (ii) reference to the coming of the Mahdi as a saviour. The first two generations of Islam, mainly *Sahabah* - the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ)- and *Tabi'in* - the children of Sahaba – focused on *fitan*. Hence, these two generations understood the purpose of these hadiths as creating awareness of *fitan*, as discussed above. However, after the eighth century CE people emphasized the second part- the coming of the Mahdi as a saviour - and understood the purpose of these hadiths as encouraging the people to wait for the Mahdi to solve injustice and disorder. The political and religious crisis in the Muslim world during the eighth century CE changed the focus from *fitan* to the political leadership of the Mahdi. This change of purpose in this research is discussed under two sub-themes: political crisis and religious reasons.

4.2.1 The political crisis changed the purpose of the Mahdi hadith

This research highlights the change in the purpose of these hadiths due to the political crisis during the eighth century CE. With the murder of Uthman in 656 CE, the Muslim world witnessed *fitan*-corruption in politics. This turmoil continued during the early Umayyad period (756-1031 CE).[58] Introduction of hereditary politics by Umayyad Caliph Muawiyah (ﷺ) (602-680 CE), murder of Hussain ibn 'Ali (R.A.) (646-683 CE), and evolution of religious movements to take revenge for the murder of Hussain (R.A.) by political means complicated the political environment.

At this point, each group found religious emotions as a means of political advantage. Therefore, some political groups used the religious texts, mainly the hadiths, for different purposes, while

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[58] Hatim Hanoi, "Financial crises in Iraq in the third century H/ ninth century CE and means of encountering," *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities* 26, no. 7 (2019): 331–312.

others fabricated a few. This is apparent in the statement of Ibn Seerin (653-729 CE), an expert in hadiths. He said that the people accepted hadiths without questioning their source until the political murder of 'Uthman (ﷺ), the third Caliph of the Muslim world, in 656 CE. However, after his death, people started asking about hadith sources; they only accepted a hadith if the source was a person associated with mainstream Islam (*Ahl al-Sunnah*) and rejected it when the source of a hadith is a person associated with new political or religious groups (*Ahl-al-Bida'a*).[59] Ibn Seerin thus identified the beginning of hadith fabrication with *Ahl-Al-Bida'a*.[60] According to Mustapha Siba'i, hadiths were fabricated mainly against political and religious leaders, particularly to highlight their unfavourable characteristics.[61] This shows that political and religious reasons were instrumental to hadith fabrication.

Contextual analysis of the Mahdi hadiths also revealed that political motivation had changed the purpose of focusing on these hadiths from creating awareness of corruption to political leadership of the Mahdi. The political dispute between Ibn Zubair (624-692 CE), then the Caliph of Makkah (684-692 CE) and al-Mukthar al-Ùhaqafi, leader of a political group (622-687 CE) in Iraq, led the latter to change the focus of the Mahdi hadith from creating awareness on religiosity to emphasis on political leadership that would establish a just government.[62] In changing the focus in the purpose of these hadiths, al-Mukthar al- Ùhaqafi wanted to advance the claim that Mohammad Ibn al-Hanafiyyah (637-700 CE), the son of the fourth Caliph Ali (R.A.) was the awaited Mahdi with him as the latter's Minister.[63] Hence, Al-Mukhtār al-Ùhaqafi declared the

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[59] Al-Nawavi, "*Al-isnad min al-din,*" *Introduction to Commentary to Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1392), 204-208.

[60] Umar ibn Hasan, *Al-Wad'u Fi al-Hadith,* vol 1, (Beirut: Manahil al-Irfan., 2012), 204-208.

[61] Mustapha Siba'i, *Sunnah Wa Makanatuha Fi al-Tashree'i al-Islami* (Cairo: Dar al- Salam, 2006), 79.

[62] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-sina'ah al-hadithiyyuah…."*

[63] Ibid.

legitimacy of his fight against Ibn Zubair and demanded people's support arguing that it was a religious cause.[64]

This shows how the political crisis during the eighth century CE contributed to the change of purpose from creating awareness of corruption to claiming political leadership. Al-Mukhtār al-Ùhaqafi and other political groups found these hadiths to be suggestive enough in meaning to allow them to interpret them for their own interest. It was from this period onwards that the Mahdi hadiths have been misused.[65] Extremist groups like ISIS also have misused these hadiths to motivate young people towards violence.

4.2.2 Religious reasons changed the appreciation of the Mahdi hadiths after the eighth century AD

Apart from the political background, religious reasons also contributed to the change of purpose of these hadiths. The religious movements and groups that appeared during the eighth century CE used religious sentiments to gain people's support for their growth. For this purpose, these religious movements and groups interpreted certain hadiths, including the Mahdi hadiths, in their favour. For instance, a group of Shia Muslims played a significant role in changing the purpose of the Mahdi hadiths.[66] This group introduced mystic tendencies and divinely appointed Imams in understanding Islamic *'aqidah*.[67] As a result, they developed the Mahdi as a concept and included Mahdism as a doctrine in their belief systems.[68] This religious inspiration contributed to the change in purpose of the Mahdi hadiths from creating awareness of *fitan* to claiming political leadership as the world nears its end.

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[64] Badr Shahin *Al-Abbas* (Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2001), 62, https://www.masjed.ir/Content/media/article/Al-Abbas_0.pdf.

[65] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-sina'ah al-hadithiyyah…"*

[66] Jessica A. Coope, "Religious and cultural conversion to Islam in ninth-century Umayyad Córdoba," *Journal of World History* 4, no. 1 (Spring, 1993): 47–68.

[67] Abdol-Hosein Zarrinkoob, "Persian-Sufism in its historical perspective," *Iranian Studies* 3, no. 3–4 (1970): 139-220.

[68] Shigeru Kamada, "Mahdi and Maitreya (Miroku): Saviors in Islam and Buddhism." *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions: JISMOR* 8 (2012): 59–76.

The purpose of the Mahdi hadiths thus changed over time due to political and religious reasons. The purpose of these hadiths, as understood by the first two generations, was to positively impact society by restraining them from involvement in *fitan* while upholding religious principles in their social interactions. However, the purpose of these hadiths, as understood by the generations after the eighth century CE, impacted negatively and created divisions among Muslims regarding politics and religion. It is apparent that this change fuels extremism and violence among Muslim youth.

5. Conclusion

This research studied the extremists' justification of violence based on the Mahadi hadiths that prophesied the advance of Mahdi at the end of time. Our study of these hadiths began with an examination of their authenticity according to established *sanad* and *matan* criteria. The meanings of these hadiths were explored using the contextual analysis method. This method helped extract the essential meanings of these hadiths and interpret them in our present context. *Asbab wurud al-hadith* as well as *maqasid al-shari'ah* were employed in focusing on the process of contextualization.

The contextual reading of these hadiths refutes the extremists' claim of legitimacy to create instability that is aimed at accelerating the coming of Mahdi. This finding has been discussed under two themes: the purpose of these hadiths and the change of this purpose over time.

The contextual analysis of these hadiths shows that their underlying purpose is the creation of awareness of corruption among Muslims. However, this purpose has been changed, shifting the emphasis from creating awareness of corruption to expectation of political leadership. This change causes psycho-social issues to arise in Muslim society.

This change happened after two centuries of Islam. Since there are no precise, detailed references to Mahdi in the Qur'an, the issue of the coming of the Mahdi was not popular among the *sahabah* and the *tabi'in*. However, it became a major point of discussion among political and religious groups after the eighth century CE.

Hence, the researchers would strongly argue that the Muslim society needs to promote the original purpose of these hadiths. This is because these hadiths may serve as potent resources to motivate the Muslim society to work for peace while avoiding corruption and misbehaviour. Since violence and corruption have no place in Islam, the Muslim religious and civil society leaders should not allow the radicals and extremists to exploit these hadiths and other Islamic apocalyptic literature to influence young people into indulgence in extremism and violent activities.

This research also argues for the need for Muslim religious leaders and political authorities to review the current approaches to the teaching of the Mahdi and other apocalyptic hadiths in Muslim educational institutions with the view of incorporating contextualization methodology to educate students to interpret texts in the context.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

	Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	'	'	'	'	ز	z	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	b	ڑ	—	—	—	ṛ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	—	p	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	zh	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ٹ	—	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	sh	ه	h	h	h¹	h¹
ث	th	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	j	ض	ḍ	ẓ	ż	ż	ى	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ch	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah			-a²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al³			
خ	kh	kh	kh	kh	ع	'	'	'	'					
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğ	gh					
ڈ	—	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f	f					
ذ	dh	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k	q					
ر	r	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	k					

¹ – when not final
² – at in construct state
³ – (article) al - or 1-

VOWELS

		Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī	ī
Doubled	يّ	iyy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	iyy (final form ī)
	وّ	uww (final form ū) uvv (for Persian)	uv	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	au	ev
	ى	ai or ay	ay	ey
Short	◌َ	a	a	a or e
	◌ُ	u	u	u or ü o or ö
	◌ِ	i	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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