

The pseudo-Mahdi of the nineteenth century: Mahdi-e-Sudani

The fact is that if there had been no false claimants of Mahdaviyat the belief of Mahdaviyat would have been labeled as artificial and un-Islamic. But since the dawn of Islam there had been a continuous flow of false claimants from among the perpetrators of falsehood. They have appeared in various corners of the world.

In the 19th century some people claimed to be special deputies (Naib Khaas) of Imam Mahdi (A.T.F.S.) and for some days propagated their false claims. Later when they found that it is not sufficient for their vile purposes they claimed to be the Mahdi and then claimed prophethood. But this claim did not influence the majority of the people. Only some selfish or gullible people supported their claim. Hence, ultimately they claimed divinity.

The reason behind the writing of this article is to prove that due to these false claimants, the sensible and impartial people conclude that the belief in Mahdaviyat is not un-Islamic. Neither is it exclusive to any particular sect of Islam. The Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) has informed about it sometimes to his family members and sometimes among his companions.

The utterances of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) make it clear that the belief of Mahdi (A.T.F.S.) is a belief from the foundations of Islamic doctrine. The rejection of this belief renders one an infidel. The compiler of the book 'Yanaabiul Mawadda', Sulaiman Qundoozi Hanafi has recorded the following tradition :-

One who rejects the rising of Al-Mahdi (A.T.F.S.), has committed infidelity. Numerous such traditions and reports are to be found. Yet, many scholars have quite strangely objected to this belief and have not even cared for the sayings of the righteous companions. The foremost among these are the Egyptian writers Ahmed Amin and great exegesis of Qur'an, Allama Tantavi Jauhari. According to them "the belief in the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (A.T.F.S.), alone, is responsible for the various conflicts among the people and the various uprisings which have weakened the Muslim world. This belief has caused a great dissension among Muslims." They have tried through their writings to spread poison among the people and take them away from the belief in Mahdaviyat; whereas the belief is absolutely Islamic and it guarantees hope, steadfastness and assurance to the society.

If Ahmed Amin had applied common sense, studied history and sociology, he would have found that people have misused everything to achieve their evil designs, be that, rights blessings, truth, accord, justice, trust, truthfulness, civilization, culture, education, training, progress, innovation, religion, faith, independence, democracy etc. All these have been misused in the past, now and shall always be in the future too. So much so that they have not left alone even the belief in Allah and the prophethood. Then they turned their attention towards the "Belief of Mahdaviyat" and rejected it as an artificial belief. They tried in vain to support their allegations with lame arguments. They failed to disprove it and were themselves degraded. Actually they did not deserve even this much attention. Anyway, in spite of such objections and allegations the belief of Mahdaviyat was unaffected. No doubt, if something is based on truth cannot be refuted.

This steadiness is the proof of this belief being an Islamic belief. Hence, many selfish

and power hungry people from among the Shias and the Sunnis raised false claims of Mahdaviyat and spread strife among the people. One such power hungry and greedy gobbler Mahdi-e-Sudani.

The life of Mahdi-e-Sudani:

Mahdi Sudani was born in 1848 at the Sudanese village of Dolga which was the village of boat builders. He is the claimant who became the most well-known pseudo-Mahdi in Europe. His actual name was Mohammad Ahmad and he assumed the title of Mahdi. By displaying excessive piety, he gained respect and honour at the age of twenty-two years. He was an eloquent speaker and condemned the Egyptian authorities in his speeches. He exposed the tyranny of the rulers to the people and laid great stress upon the re-appearance of Mahdi.

This self-proclaimed deputy of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) and the false leader of the Muslims raised the standard of revolt in Sudan where existed the corrupt government of Egyptians in connivance with the oppressive Britishers. In his eloquent speeches he condemned the tyranny of the Egyptians to such an extent that the dislike for Egyptians became imbued among the Sudanese people. He made special references to Imam Mahdi (A.T.F.S.) and gradually proclaimed himself to be connected with the Mahdi as per the usual practice of the false claimants at the start of their claim. Finally, he claimed to be Mahdi himself from the lineage of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.), the 12th Imam and the son of Imam Hasan Askari (A.S.). After obtaining basic education, he entered into the Sanusiya Sufi order and on the Island of Abba began to spend his time in meditation. His false claim of Mahdaviyat received support for the first time on this Island which is 150 miles south of Khartoum.

A group of people pledged allegiance to him and he made a secret claim of Mahdaviyat.

Some historians state that after joining the Sanusiya Sufi order he had an argument with his Peer (Sufi guide) and hence began to collect his own disciples and subsequently claimed to be Mahdi of the time and the last Imam. At the outset only Abdullah Al-Taaisha (Caliph) supported and advised him to accompany him to a place where the militant tribes could be instigated to rise in revolt.

In May 1881 the Egyptian government issued an order for him to present himself in Khartoum and clarify his position. But Mohammad Ahmad ignored this order, assumed rulership of the country and declared holy war against the infidels as well as the progressive Muslims.

The Egyptian government dispatched an army of two hundred soldiers under Rauf Pasha to subdue him. On 11th of August the Egyptians landed on the Island of Abba to attack the followers of Mohammad Ahmad. The supporters of Mohammad Ahmad did not possess any fire arms so they kept themselves hidden till night fell. As soon as it was dark they surrounded the Egyptian army and attacked it ferociously till the complete army was wiped out. After this Mohammad Ahmad fled to a secluded place where the possibility of retaliation from the Egyptian army did not exist. On the way he met the local leaders from whom he learned that there was great discontent among the people regarding the Egyptian government. The abolishing of slave trade was also a cause of economic unrest.

At the Jebel Ghadir he had to face the men of Yusuf Pasha and they compelled him to retrace his steps. In May 1882 the Egyptian government dispatched an army of 6000 to attack Mohammad Ahmad. One night, Mohammad Ahmad attacked the army of Yusuf Pasha and put them to death. After victory Mohammad Ahmad gained more clout and was joined by many people greedy for the spoils of war.

In the last part of the month of November 1882 Mohammad Ahmad concluded that he had sufficient military strength to capture the Egyptian fort of Al-Abeed. So he

attacked Al- Abeed and captured it. Then he converted the fort as his residents and made it the seat of power.

Mohammad Ahmad used to wear a simple cotton dress.

His followers also imitated him in his style of dressing. Outwardly he put up a facade of simplicity but used to lead a life of sensuality in secret. Women were his weakness. He tried to imitate the conditions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) and called his wife Ummul Momeneen Ayesha. He also named his followers after the companions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) viz. Abu Bakr, Umar, Hassaan ibn Saabit, Khalid bin Waleed, etc. The common followers were called as helpers (Ansar) He seemed to bring about the condition similar to the time of the Holy Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.). But actually it was not so. If it had not been the spread of oppression by the British and the Egyptians, this pseudo Mahdi would never had succeeded. But the oppressed people were tired of the tyranny and hence various tribes joined hands with Mohammad Ahmad.

When Mohammad Ahmad traveled for the first time from the Island of Abba towards Masat he termed his journey as "Hijrat" - migration. He also appointed his four caliphs. The first caliph was Abdullah Al-Taasha. He was given the title of Abu Bakr. He pretended to establish a rule on the Qur'anic principles but the actual fact was that he wanted to put up this false show so that he could collect people under himself. In order to administer the country, he collected both Zakaat and Khums. But the distribution of the same was with favoritism. He prohibited the study of religion and Fiqh. He only stressed on the recitation of the Holy Qur'an but strictly prohibited any discussion on it. Like the

Wahabis he prohibited the consumption of tobacco and considered it. more sinful than drinking wine. He did not forgive even the smallest of the sins.

Due to the Egyptian and the British rule, Sudan was passing through a very critical period. The British dispatched an army of 10,000 under William to attack Mohammad Ahmad. On the 3rd of November Mohammad Ahmad reached Kashgil to confront the army and inflicted a terrible defeat upon it.

Now the whole of Sudan was virtually under his control.

In December 1884 the army sent by Salauddin Pasha under an Austrian officer was defeated by Mohammad Ahmad after a conflict which lasted a whole year. At this defeat the British prepared to flee Sudan. In order to facilitate this exit, General Charles George Gordon was dispatched. Prior to this, he had held the post of the Governor General of Sudan and hence was very popular among the locals. Secondly he was capable to handle Mohammad Ahmad who had by now established himself as the Mahdi and the complete master of Sudan. He reached Khartoum on the 18th February 1884 and made an offer of recognizing the rule of Mohammad Ahmad if he would free all the prisoners. He also offered to permit the resumption of the slave trade.

Instead of accepting these conditions Mohammed Ahmad prepared to attack Khartoum and on the 22nd August laid siege to the city. Even though he could not [ace the fire arms and the sophisticated weapons he prolonged the siege so much that the people began to worry. There was a great shortage of the necessities of ;ife in the city as Mohammad Ahmad had prevented all sort of communication.

Mohammad Ahmad found the time ripe for his purpose and entered the city on 25th January 1885 and started plunder and destruction.

General Gordon was killed just outside his palace. Sudan was completely lost to the British and Mohammad Ahmad made Khartoum the seat of his Caliphate. In order that he may exercise a complete control over sudan he sealed all the borders and even prohibited the aeople from going for Hajj.

this false Mahdi died on 22nd June 1885 due to high fever. He had already appointed Abdullah Al-Taasha as his successor but due to his weak disposition he faced

defeat at the hands of General Kitchener. Sudan once again fell into the hands of the British. In order to take revenge the British dug up the grave of Mohammad Ahmad, cut off his head and sent it to England.

May Allah protect us all from such power hungry and misguiding "Mahdis".

Up till now we have written about the 'Mahdi' who raised his false claim in Sudan and whose name was Mohammad Ahmad. A short account of his life has been given of the same. As we have stated in the beginning the instances of the claimants of Mahdaviyat had been since the early period of Islam and in the future too there are possibilities of it. The ignorant and the foolish or the selfish people have also accepted their claims. There have been some false claimants where the affair is still continued in their progeny generation after generation. These claims were raised by taking the assistance of the tradition of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) wherein he says "Mahdi will appear from My Ahlebayt and fill the earth with justice and equity like it has been filled with oppressions and tyranny."

But the false claimants only referred to this part of the hadith for their selfish motives. The truth demands that they should also have studied those traditions and fulfilled the conditions where the hadith describes the special characteristic of Mahdi (A.T.F.S.).

Even for the time being if we consider that the false claimants had ulterior motives and selfishness in raising their claims, then what shall we say of those people who propagates these claims even after these claimants have died.

They are foremost in spreading their false propaganda and pretend to be knowledgeable and intelligent when they are cornered by logical arguments and scriptural proofs they try to defend their allegations by means of far-fetched arguments and intricate derivations and complex explanations. They try to skirt the issue very cunningly.

For the benefit of our reader we quote the tradition of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) which speaks clearly about the characteristics features of Mahdi (A.T.F.S.) where there is no scope for individual interpretations or deductions. The false claimants support their claim by this hadith but, when the same hadith speaks of the characteristic feature of Mahdi they pretend to be ignorant.

Readers are requested to read the following tradition and in the light of the characteristic feature of Mahdi (A.T.F.S.) mentioned in it compare the various claimants of Mahdaviyat who, time and again have raised the banner of misguidance and led astray a substantial number of gullible people.

The days of the world will not end and the time will not be over till the Arab world is not ruled by a person from My Ahlebayt (A.S.) whose name shall be My name. (Musnad Ahmad Hanbal Pub. I313A.11., vol.1, page 376}

In the light of this tradition let us see if any of the claimants have fulfilled the criteria. Even if we include all the Sadaat (Syed) among the progeny of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) there had been only two claimants who had been Sadaat. One was Syed Bab and the other was Syed Mohammad Jaunpuri. They had raised their respective claims in Iran and India. The hadith says that the Mahdi (A.T.F.S.) will rule the Arab world but these two did not attain post of even the Tehsildar (administrative officer) in their own villages. Then how is it possible for us to accept their claims?

Even if a day remains for the time to end certainly Allah will send a man from My progeny who will fill the earth with justice and equity like it had been filled with injustice and oppression.

(Sunan Abi .Da wood vol.2, Page 207, Egyptian edition)

Kindly note that all the claimants since the beginning of Islam have raised their claims with a great show of pomp and glory but none of them have been able to fill

the earth with justice and equity. Rather, there has been an increase in corruption and injustice and oppression more prevalent. Instead of an atmosphere of peace and prosperity there had been a reign of wars and terror, death and destruction. And this is increasing each day. Not far from us, in the 19th century Mirza Ghulam Ahmed Qadiani raised his false claim from Punjab. At least the banner of peace and prosperity and equity and justice should have been established in India if not over the whole world. But we have all seen how the British unleashed a reign of terror and that too in his time. He watched it silently and instead of speaking about justice and equity he and his followers adhered to the commands of the British. Instead of the propagation of amity the country itself was partitioned. The Punjab where he raised his claim itself was divided into two parts. Even today all sorts of destruction is prevalent in Punjab like the other parts of the country or rather like other countries.

In the light of the tradition of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) it is against the dignity of the Mahdi whom Allah is to send to establish justice and peace. The same could be said regarding Ali Mohammad Shirazi Bab. The subject of this essay, Mahdi Sudani should also be measured with the same yardstick. Because it is not possible to go into more details in this brief essay let us conclude with a couplet which can be a pointer for the intended explanation :

Let me see if there is one who could fill the cup of every person otherwise all who came claimed to be the Spiritual guides.