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The Major Occultation

The major occultation began after the death of Ali bin Muhammad Samari in 328 A.H. and the point of referral and general deputyship of His Eminence, the Master of the Age (a.s.) reached the great jurists. Throughout the period of the major occultation attention and written communications have come from His Eminence (a.s.), to the prominent and knowledgeable Shia personalities.

For example, that great personality sent a few letters to the great scholar and leader, Shaykh Mufeed from his side, which were received by Shaykh Mufeed, and we shall quote two of these letters in the coming pages. Similarly it has been proved by widely related reports that some pious and righteous Shia persons were blessed with the audience of His Eminence (a.s.) and its details shall be stated in the forthcoming discussion.

Dajjals

A group of hypocrites and deviated people claimed that they were the deputies of the Awaited Imam (a.s.). Their root cause was either jealousy with the honorable emissaries of His Eminence (a.s.) or they intended to usurp the monies dispatched by the Shias for the Imam (a.s.). By way of examples we shall mention a few of such claimants below.

Ahmad bin Hilal

Ahmad bin Hilal Karkhi was of the companions of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) and after the martyrdom of His Eminence (a.s.) the special deputyship of Muhammad bin Uthman from His Eminence, the Master of the Age (a.s.) made him jealous. Hence he denied the deputyship of Muhammad. Shias asked him why he did not accept the commands of Muhammad bin Uthman while the Holy Imam (a.s.) has clearly made his obedience compulsory.

He replied, "I have not heard about his deputyship openly and clearly."

They told him, "Though you have not heard, other reliable and trustworthy people have heard it."

He said, “Your hearing is for you.”¹

Some of the claims of Karkhi and his written statements prove that he had departed from religion and denied some necessary principles of faith.

Imam’s (a.s.) Censure of Karkhi

When the denial of Ahmad bin Karkhi became public knowledge, Imam (a.s.) became aloof from him and an epistle was received from him containing curse on Ahmad bin Hilal.

“We seek aloofness from Ibn Hilal from the Almighty Allah (SwT). May Allah (SwT) not have mercy on him and those who do not seek aloofness from him. Then convey this matter to Ishaqi and his townspeople and inform about this sinner man and also whoever who has inquired about it or would inquire from you in the future.”²

Hasan Sharii

But Hasan Sharii was a liar and a Dajjal (mischief-maker) and was formerly a companion of His Eminence, Imam Hadi (a.s.) and Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) and later he became an apostate. He claimed to be the holder of the venerable position of the deputyship of His Eminence, Imam Mahdi (a.s.). And he attributed those things to the Holy Imams (a.s.) that did not befit them.

Those great personalities dissociated themselves from him. Therefore the Shias have also sought aloofness from him and cursed him. His Eminence (a.s.) has also cursed him in one of his blessed epistles.³

Husain bin Mansur

Husain bin Mansur al Hallaj was another liar, deviant and misguiding from truth who claimed deputyship of His Eminence, the Awaited Imam (a.s.). And he requested the prominent Shias to accept his deputyship. Therefore he sent a letter to Abu Sahl Nawbakhti and desired from him that he join him and promised to give him a lot of wealth.

Nawbakhti replied, “I am a person who is fond of bondmaids but my old age is an obstacle in my enjoyments. Every Friday I am compelled to dye my grey hair. So it would be very nice if you can make me needless of hair dye, save me from this expense and also make my beard black. If you do this I shall become your follower and it would also prove the veracity of your claim! Consequently I would become your greatest companion and propagator.”

Hallaj was perplexed by this demand of Nawbakhti and this incident became public knowledge. It became a topic of great amusement while the deceit and deviation of Hallaj became clear for the people.

An example of Hallaj’s fraud is as follows. He invited an intelligent person to dinner. When he arrived at

his place, Hallaj told him, “If I stretch my hands towards the river, I could catch a live fish from there.” Then he went into the room and came back with a big live fish in his hands and presented it to his guest saying, “This is my miracle.”

Perchance there was a knock at the door from inside. Hallaj went inside and the guest also went inside the house to find behind the curtain a pool having many fishes. The guest also caught a fish brought it inside and placed it next to the fish Hallaj had brought. When Hallaj returned, the guest told him, “This is my miracle.” Hallaj was shocked and hastily expelled the guest from his house because he had detected his fraud.

Hallaj used to pose himself to be very pious and religious. He was seen in the mountains of Isfahan wearing tattered clothes and carrying a water-skin and a walking stick.

Another Fraud of Husain bin Mansur

He had instructed some of his disciples to conceal a quantity of sweet meat and bread at a particular spot in the desert. Then he took along some people with him and with his companions went to that same desert. When he reached that place, his disciple used to remark, “How nice it would have been if we had got bread and Halwa (sweet) right now, so that we could have enjoyed it.”

At that time Hallaj would recede to a corner and pray two units of prayer and supplicate the Lord for bread and Halwa for the people. His disciple would intentionally wait for sometime as if waiting for the acceptance of prayers. Then he used to go to that place where bread and Halwa was buried and announce, “We have received this bread and Halwa as a result of the prayer of Hallaj.”

Many gullible people used to be influenced by this fraud and it seemed to be an unnatural phenomenon and a miracle and they used to become such zealous disciple of his that they even sought his urine as means of cure.⁴

It is said that Hallaj also claimed divinity and one of his writing says as follows, “If one fasts for three days continuously without breaking it and then breaks it with three leaves of Chicory, the Almighty Allah (SwT) would forever exempt him from keeping the fasts of the month of Ramadan!

And anyone who recites a two-rakat (unit) prayer from sunset till the next morning, Allah (SwT) would make him needless of prayer. One who donates all of ones property on a single day in charity would gain exemption from performing Hajj. And one who stays at the graves of martyrs in the Quraish cemetery for ten days, praying and fasting and breaking the fast only with some barley bread and salt he would be made needless of worship and obedience of Allah (SwT).”

Hallaj is credited with having started many innovations. His activities were reported to the Abbaside Caliph, Muqtadir, who had him arrested and executed in 309 A.H.

Muhammad bin Ali

Muhammad bin Ali Shalmaghani, popularly known as Ibn Abil Gharaqar was a moderate for a long time and had no sort of deviation. But after that due to jealousy towards Shaykh Abul Qasim Husain bin Ruh, the special deputy of His Eminence, Imam Mahdi (a.s.), he became deviated and he left the religion of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), aligning himself with some debased sects.

Some of the principles of those sects were: No kind of worship act was obligatory and every kind of adultery between people of prohibited degree as well as others was allowed. Also, that every person of high social class should marry a spouse of a lower class so that he may induct effulgence into them.

An epistle was issued by His Eminence, the Master of the Age (a.s.), containing curse on Shalmaghani and stating his dissociation from him.

When the innovations of Shalmaghani became known to all, the ruler of that time had him executed in Baghdad in 323 A.H.

Some of the above false claimants and Dajjals of the period of minor occultation came into being due to their jealousy towards the special deputyship of the Imam of the time (a.s.), and considered themselves to be deprived of that exalted position and that's why they resorted to such fraudulent claims.

Claimants of Mahdaviyat

During the whole period of history there were some people who for the sake of political gains claimed to be Mahdi in spite of the fact that they did not profess the religion of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). We shall discuss a few of such claimants in the following pages.

Mahdi Sudani

Among such well-known characters was Mahdi Sudani from the African continent.

Mahdi Sudani was born in 1848 at the Sudanese village of Dolga inhabited by people whose main occupation was building boats. He became the most well-known pseudo-Mahdi in Europe. His real name was Muhammad Ahmad and he assumed the title of Mahdi.

By displaying excessive piety, he gained respect and honor at the age of twenty-two years. He was an eloquent speaker and he mostly condemned Egyptian authorities in his speeches. He exposed the tyranny of the rulers to the people and laid great stress upon the reappearance of Mahdi.

This self-proclaimed deputy of the Prophet (S) and the false leader of the Muslims raised the standard of revolt in Sudan, which was under the rule of Egyptians in connivance with the oppressive Britishers. In his eloquent speeches he condemned the tyranny of the Egyptians to such an extent that Sudanese

people began to hate them.

He made special references to Imam Mahdi (a.s.) and gradually proclaimed himself to be connected with the Mahdi as had been the usual practice of all false claimants at the start of their claim. Finally, he claimed to be Mahdi himself from the lineage of the Holy Prophet (S), 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.

Beginning of his Mission

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 (a.s.). At the outset itself 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 Muhammad Ahmad ignored this order, assumed rulership of the country and declared a 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 Muhammad Ahmad. The supporters of Muhammad Ahmad did not possess any firearms 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 Muhammad 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 Muhammad Ahmad. One night, Muhammad Ahmad attacked the army of Yusuf Pasha and put them to death. After victory Muhammad 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, Muhammad 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 residence and made it the seat of power.

Muhammad 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) and called his wife Ummul Momineen Ayesha.

He also named his followers after the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) 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).

But actually it was not so. If it had not been for the spread of oppression by the British and the Egyptians, this pseudo Mahdi would have never succeeded. But the oppressed people were tired of the tyranny and hence various tribes joined hands with Muhammad Ahmad.

When Muhammad 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 Quranic 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 Zakat 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 Quran 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.

Control on Sudan

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 Muhammad Ahmad. On the 3rd of November Muhammad 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 Muhammad Ahmad after a conflict that 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 Muhammad 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 Muhammad 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 face the firearms 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 life in the city as Muhammad Ahmad had prevented all sort of communication. Muhammad 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 by the British and Muhammad 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 people from going for Hajj.

[Death of Mahdi Sudani](#)

This false Mahdi died on 22nd June 1885 due to high fever. He had already appointed Abdullah Al Taaisha 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 Muhammad Ahmad, cut off his head and sent it to England.

[Mahdi Tahama](#)

Mahdi Tahama was a native of Yemen and around the year 1159 A.D. he appeared and claimed that he was the Awaited Imam (a.s.) whose glad tidings were given by the Prophet (S).

A group of Bedouins followed him and he annexed the Kingdom of Hamadani dynasty in Sanaa and Najjahi Kingdom in Zubaid. His grandson, Abdul Nabi took over the position of his grandfather in 1162 A.D. and continued the efforts of his predecessor. However, Turan Shah, on behalf of Salauddin Ayyubi destroyed his rule.^{[5](#)}

[Mahdi of Senegal](#)

In 1828 A.D. a character appeared in Senegal and claimed to be the Awaited Mahdi. He took up the standard of revolt against the regime of that time but was defeated badly and executed.^{[6](#)}

[Mahdi of Soos](#)

Soos is a town in Western Arabia. In this place a man arose and claimed to be the Awaited Imam (a.s.). A large number of people began to follow him but he was shot dead.^{[7](#)}

[Mahdi of Somalia](#)

A person named Muhammad, the son of Abdullah Somalian claimed in 1899 A.H. to be the Awaited Imam (a.s.). He had great influence in his tribe, Ujadin and he fought the British and Italian forces for almost 20 years and died in 1920 A.H.^{[8](#)}

These were some persons who claimed to be the Promised Mahdi. Here we conclude our discussion on this subject.

- [1.](#) Ghaybah, Shaykh Tusi; Mojamur Rijalul Hadith Vol. 2 Pg. 369
- [2.](#) Ghaybah, Shaykh Tusi
- [3.](#) Ghaybah, Shaykh Tusi, Al-Ihtijaj, Tabarsi, Mojam Rijalul Hadith, Vol. 5, Pg. 166
- [4.](#) Arabic = Tabarruk
- [5.](#) Tarikh Ash Shaubul Islamiya, Pg. 324–326
- [6.](#) Hazirul al-Islami, 2/195
- [7.](#) Al-Burhan, 1/281
- [8.](#) Tarikh Ashshuyub al-Islamiya, Pg. 640

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