

**"Reassessing Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri and the Mahdavi
Movement: A Reappraisal of History and Thought
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Abstract

This research paper presents an analytical and critical study of the Mahdavi movement within the religious and intellectual history of the Indian subcontinent, focusing on its background, evolution, and the personality and role of its founder, Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri (RA).

Drawing upon historical sources such as Muntakhab alTawarikh, TabaqatiAkbari, A'iniAkbari, Akhbar alAkhyar, Nuzhat alKhawatir, and Tadhkira by Abul Kalam Azad, the author demonstrates that Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri (RA) neither claimed prophethood nor divinity, nor did he issue any edict to abandon the essential pillars of Islam such as prayer and fasting.

Rather, he was a pious scholar, ascetic, and reformer of Shari'ah, who launched a movement for amr bil ma'ruf (enjoining good) and the revival of true Islamic practice amid a period of moral and religious decline. However, his later followers, through excess and misunderstanding, transformed his reformist call into a distinct sectarian identity.

The research further establishes that Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri's contemporaries such as Shaykh 'Ali Muttaqi, 'Abd alHaqq Muhaddith Dehlavi, 'Abd alQadir Badayuni, and Shaykh Wajih alDin Gujaratipraised his knowledge, piety, asceticism, and spiritual insight, even though they differed with some of his theological interpretations.

In conclusion, this paper argues that identifying Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri (RA) as the "Promised Mahdi" is not a reflection of his true teachings, but rather the outcome of later reinterpretations and exaggerations by his followers.

Hence, the study serves as a balanced, intellectually moderate, and historically grounded contribution to the understanding of South Asia's religious reform movements offering a valuable scholarly resource for researchers of Sufism and Islamic revivalism.

Keywords: Mahdavi, movement ,Muntakhab alTawarikh, TabaqatiAkbari, fasting

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The Founder of the Mahdavi Movement

It is indeed strange that the person regarded as the founder of the Mahdavi movement, according to researchers, was not truly responsible for the sect's later deviations. Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri was proclaimed as the Mahdi, and a sect arose in his name which later introduced doctrines and beliefs that the scholars of Islam unanimously rejected as erroneous.

Regarding Syed Muhammad, Abu'lFazl writes in AiniAkbari:

"He was a Sayyid of Owaisi lineage, endowed with abundant spirituality and mastery over both external and internal sciences. Out of spiritual ecstasy, he claimed to be the Mahdi, and many people became his followers. Numerous miracles are attributed to him. The source of his Mahdism arose from Jaunpur, and Sultan Muhammad became devoted to him. Due to the jealousy of his contemporaries, he migrated to Iran and passed away in Farah, where he was laid to rest."¹

In modern times, the distinguished scholar Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, in his renowned work Tazkira, writes:

"Syed Muhammad was a native of Jaunpur, born in 847 AH. Even his most severe opponents admitted that along with mastery in the formal sciences, he was unmatched in piety, asceticism, and Godconsciousness."²

Sheikh 'Ali Muttaqi, a contemporary and strong critic of Syed Muhammad (who even wrote a treatise refuting him), nevertheless admits:

"His early years were spent in deep asceticism, devotion, and spiritual absorption. For seven years, he continually fasted and lived in seclusion. During this period, he experienced a spiritual occurrence he heard a voice declaring, 'Anta alMahdi' ('You are the Mahdi'). After long contemplation, when this experience recurred repeatedly, he finally proclaimed his Mahdihood."

That era the late 9th century AH, just before Emperor Akbar was a time of severe anarchy and political fragmentation in India. Dynasties rose and fell daily; no central authority existed to uphold the Shari'ah. True scholars were rare, and worldly clerics were abundant. Materialism, deceit, and innovation among ignorant Sufis had spread misguidance far and wide.

Seeing this, Syed Muhammad raised the call for revival of the Shari'ah and commanding right and forbidding wrong, declaring:

"Now there is no need for further ascetic struggles or ritual exercises. The greatest jihad today is to guide people to the straight path and to fight for the establishment of divine law."

His sincerity and purity of heart gave such power to his message that within a short time, thousands joined his movement, and several regional rulers pledged allegiance to him. His followers lived with profound spiritual passion, reminiscent of the faith and zeal of the early Companions (Sahabah). They renounced worldly ties and became one another's companions in the path of truth.

His teachings emphasized three key spiritual "stations":

1. Hijrah (Migration): To leave one's homeland for the sake of God.

2. Renunciation of Wealth: "You will never attain piety until you spend of what you love"³

3. Sacrifice of Life: "If you are truthful, then wish for death."⁴

4. All these teachings were sound in principle, but later followers exaggerated them and distorted their meaning turning spiritual ideals into literal laws that contradicted Islamic inheritance and jurisprudence.

Both followers and critics, therefore, drifted away from the original truth. The result was severe opposition, persecution, and even execution of his followers. His fearless stance against worldly scholars provoked their wrath, and his movement was banned in several regions.

When opposition peaked, Syed Muhammad migrated to Gujarat, where Sultan Mahmud Begarha became his admirer. Yet opposition from clerics forced him to journey to Hijaz and later to Iran during the reign of Shah Ismail Safavi. Seeing his growing following, the ruler ordered him to leave. While returning to India, he passed away in Farah (Afghanistan) in 911 AH.

Mulla 'Abd alQadir Badayuni records:

"In this year (911 AH), Mir Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri one of the great saints who had claimed to be the Mahdi passed away in Farah while returning from the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca."⁵

Mulla Badayuni's contemporary, Shaykh 'Abd alHaqq Muhaddith Dehlavi, wrote:

"In belief, Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri attained the same spiritual perfection that Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, possessed though in his case, it was by following and not by original authority."⁶

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad observes in Tazkira:

"It is not clear whether Syed Muhammad himself claimed these things or if his disciples, through exaggeration and misunderstanding, attributed them to him. None of his own writings survive; even Umm al'Aqa'id, ascribed to him, was written by his followers."

Maulana Azad explains that even if these statements are authentic, they should be seen as the ecstatic utterances (shathiyyat) of a mystic overwhelmed by divine love, not as doctrinal claims. He beautifully concludes:

"Those who are ignorant take such words as heresy, devotees take them as proof, but the people of truth and balance interpret them charitably or leave their reality to God."⁷

Many great scholars and saints held favorable or at least neutral views of Syed Muhammad. Shaykh Wajih alDin Gujarati, when presented with a fatwa declaring the Mahdavis heretics, refused to sign, saying:

"How can I oppose a people who have renounced the world and devoted themselves to truth?"⁸

Even Shaykh 'Ali Muttaqi, despite refuting Mahdavi excesses, wrote that silence about Syed Muhammad was preferable to condemnation.

(Akhbar alAkhyar, by Shaykh 'Abd alHaqq Dehlavi*)

Mulla Badayuni also admitted that "the Mahdavis held a good opinion of him."⁹

Shah Waliullah Dehlavi, as quoted by Shah 'Abd al'Aziz, wrote:

"Syed Muhammad was a realized saint connected to the Truth (Wasil billah). Some of the inspirations that came upon him were beyond ordinary comprehension, and he became mistaken about his spiritual rank not intentionally, but through misunderstanding."

Maulana Azad concludes:

"In my view, Syed Muhammad was truthful in his claim not that he was the Mahdi alMuntazar (the awaited Mahdi), but that he was a rightly guided one (alMahdi) in his own time. The confusion arose because the term Mahdi was popularly associated with the eschatological Mahdi. Perhaps what he truly experienced was the divine address, 'Anta alMuhammadi' ('You are among the rightly guided of Muhammad's path'), which his followers misunderstood and applied to the final Mahdi."¹⁰

Statement by Historian Syed Mian Sahib

The distinguished historian Syed Mian Sahib writes:

"In the humble opinion of this writer, such a claim (of being the Mahdi) can never be free from error or deviation. If one considers the literal meaning of the word Mahdi (the guided one), then why should it be exclusive to Syed Muhammad alone? In fact, every true Muslim's heart, in contrast to disbelief, misguidance, and deviation, should be filled with inner faith, conviction, and spiritual peace so that he may rightfully say, 'Ana alMahdi', meaning 'I am among the rightly guided.'

He further explains that this is not merely a divine voice heard once, but rather, every particle of creation should echo in a believer's heart: 'Anta alMahdi' ("You are among the guided"). Indeed, if a believer's heart is adorned with faith in the unseen, established prayer, charity in the path of Allah, and sincere belief in the prophets especially the Seal of the Prophets ﷺ and the divine revelation then the opening verses of the greatest chapter of the Qur'an already proclaim him to be rightly guided and successful:

"They are the ones who are upon guidance from their Lord, and they are the successful."¹¹

However, he cautions:

"Does such a person have the right to publicly proclaim himself as the Mahdi and invite others to accept this claim? The term Mahdi in the Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ is not used in its literal sense but as a specific title referring to a particular foretold individual."

The Hadiths describing the Mahdi outline clear identifying signs for example:

There will be fierce wars between Muslims and Jews and Christians;

Constantinople (Istanbul) will no longer be in Muslim hands;

The Mahdi will distribute the treasures of the Ka'bah;

He will lead successful campaigns in the path of God, and so forth.

If any person whether Sayyid or Sheikh ignores these signs and claims the title Mahdi merely by its linguistic meaning, then it would be akin to quoting the verse 'Do not approach prayer' (without its completion), thereby distorting the divine message. How could any follower of the Sunnah dare to make such a bold claim against the explicit statements of the Prophet ﷺ?

Even if one bases this claim on some private spiritual experience or supposed revelation, Muslims must decide: should such a personal claim be believed, or the words of the Truthful and Trustworthy Prophet ﷺ who speaks not from desire but through divine revelation?"

"Nor does he speak from his own desire; it is nothing but revelation sent down to him."¹²

"Falsehood cannot approach it, neither from before it nor from behind it it is a revelation from the All Wise, Worthy of Praise."¹³

Syed Mian Sahib argues that such eternal and divine confirmations belong only to that perfect servant of God the Messenger ﷺ who was sent as a witness, bearer of glad tidings, and a warner.

He continues:

"Some argue that using a word in its literal sense causes no harm. But consider this: in worldly kingdoms, even the smallest honorary titles such as His Highness, His Excellency, Sir, or Knight are legally protected and cannot be used by just anyone. How deceptive and rebellious would it be for a dismissed courtier or a pauper who has never even entered the royal court to declare himself 'His Excellency' and demand the same reverence and obedience due to a real dignitary?

Then imagine the arrogance and deceit of a person who, in the eternal and sacred kingdom of God, claims for himself a divine title reserved for someone whom God Himself will honor with both worldly and eternal greatness! For such a person, the Qur'an declares:

"Who is more unjust than one who invents a lie about Allah, or says, 'It has been revealed to me,' when nothing has been revealed to him?"¹⁴

Undoubtedly, such fabrication and forgery are acts of extreme audacity and blasphemy against the divine order."

Thus, the Prophet ﷺ described every false claimant to divine or prophetic rank as a Dajjala deceiver and impostor. Even though linguistically one might justify the use of the word nabi ("prophet"), it is forbidden because it is the dividing line between belief and disbelief. Every true Muslim must believe in all prophets without distinction:

"We make no distinction between any of His messengers."¹⁵

Though the title Mahdi does not carry the same theological weight as nabi, an unworthy or false claim to it remains impermissible and spiritually perilous.

He adds: "The greatness of the Mujaddid Alf Thani (Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi) lies

precisely in this that despite witnessing extraordinary spiritual unveilings, he never transgressed the limits set by the Prophet ﷺ and the authentic traditions."

Shaykh Abdullah Niyazi and Shaykh 'Ala'i

Returning to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's account, Syed Mian Sahib writes:

"After the death of Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri, his movement continued to expand. Many renowned mystics joined it among them Shaykh Abdullah Niyazi and his disciple Shaykh 'Ala'i, who settled in Bayana. Through their sincerity, selflessness, and deep knowledge of divine truth, they attracted hundreds of devoted followers."

Mulla Abdul Qadir Badayuni, in *Muntakhab alTawarikh* and *Nijat alRashid*, and Nizam alDin Harawi, in *Tabaqat*, have detailed their lives. *Tazkirat alWasilin* provides further information, particularly about Shaykh Da'ud Malti.

Shaykh Abdullah Niyazi was among the distinguished Sufi masters of his time and one of the prominent successors of Shaykh Salim Chishti. However, later he adopted the Mahdavi path, abandoning worldly leadership and embracing a life of ascetic poverty. "He built a humble hut outside Bayana, fetched water with his own hands, served travelers and the needy, and performed every act of humility and service for the sake of God. When he saw a laborer unable to pray due to work, he would give him his own earnings and implore him to join the congregation."

Gradually, his life became wholly devoted to love for the Creator and service to creation.

Around the same period, a renowned spiritual leader from Bihar, Shaykh 'Ala'i, a man of great scholarship and reputation, encountered Shaykh Niyazi. Though proud of his knowledge and status, once he met Niyazi and witnessed his sincerity, his heart transformed.

He confessed before his disciples:

"The true path to God is this. Whatever we practiced until now in the name of piety was nothing but ego worship. I now choose the company of this humble seeker of God. Whoever desires God's pleasure, let him follow me."

As the poet says:

"The heart that had never trembled for beauty's charm
Was conquered in a glance by a poor dervish's calm."

The Transformation of Shaykh 'Ala'i under the Influence of Shaykh Niyazi

Shaykh 'Ala'i once asked Shaykh Niyazi, "What is the path of a true seeker of Truth (ṭālibiḥaqq)?"

Shaykh Niyazi replied:

"Give away everything you possess. Leave nothing with yourself except the wealth of humility, the capital of brokenness, and the treasure of self-surrender. 'Abandon your self, then come.'

'Sell yourself for the garden of divine love, for no trade is more profitable than this.'

After this encounter, Shaykh 'Ala'i's entire life changed. He renounced the inherited *sajjādah* of spiritual authority and the seat of scholarship, abandoning all symbols of

pride and status, and joined himself completely to Shaykh Niyazi.

He left behind every trace of worldly possession.

Once he had been proud and selfcentered to the extent that he considered everyone beneath him; now, such was his humility that he felt no shame even in straightening the shoes of fellow Muslims.

He went personally to those with whom he had disputes, folded his hands, and sought forgiveness from each one of them.

Rafteh rafteh khud bakashāne‘ishq “Love gradually pulls a person entirely towards itself.”

Soon a large group joined him in this spiritual journey. People began abandoning their homes and families to join his fellowship.

They lived outside Bayana in a desolate garden, having no attachment to wives, children, relatives, or homeland.

Some would go out during the day for labor, spend onetenth of their earnings in the path of God, and bring the rest to share communally at night, eating together like members of one family, intoxicated with divine love.

Others went into the town each morning to tend to the sick, cook meals for the weak and disabled, purchase provisions for widows, and reconcile people in conflict. When faced with quarrels, they would plead for peace, saying,
“If you must, kill usbut make peace among yourselves.”

Their contentment and detachment were such that days would pass without food, yet their faces shone with serenity, as though they had just eaten in abundance.

“The ignorant think them rich because of their restraint.”¹⁶

When hunger became severe, they would begin to pray, and upon completing it, their faces glowed with a royal indifference to worldly need.

Their commitment to enjoining good and forbidding evil (amr bil ma‘rūf wa nahi ‘an almunkar) was so strong that each one carried arms, and whenever they saw a sinful act, they would stop it by hand in obedience to the Prophetic command:

“Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand.”

They bore with patience all forms of hardship insults, starvation, wounds yet never ceased their mission.

They would often say:

“The pleasure we find in hearing abuse is greater than what you find in receiving prayers.”

One among them was exiled seven times, and each time he declared:

“Exile me once more I will still not abandon the Truth.”

Morning and evening they gathered together, where Shaykh ‘Ala’i would deliver commentaries on the Qur’an.

The passion of divine love and the fire of spiritual longing infused his speech with such power that his words struck like arrows; hearts would tremble, and even the hardest souls melted in tears.

As Mulla Abdul Qadir Badayuni records:

"The spiritual influence (nafas girā'ī) of Shaykh 'Ala'i was so powerful that when he expounded upon the Qur'an, anyone who heard him would abandon his work and family, choose his companionship, bear the pains of poverty and hunger with patience, and never return to worldly occupation."¹⁷

Similarly, in *Tabaqati Akbari*, it is written:

"Every day at prayer time he delivered such commentaries on the Qur'an that whoever attended his gatherings would leave all worldly concerns, renounce family and possessions, and either enter the Mahdavi circle or repent from sins. Those engaged in farming or trade would dedicate a tenth of their income to the path of God."¹⁸ Elsewhere, Badayuni writes that as soon as Shaykh Niyazi's companionship was attained,

"A new world of understanding and reflection on the Qur'an opened before Shaykh 'Ala'i."¹⁹

"The subtleties, realities, and insights of the Qur'an were unveiled to him with ease." In a short time, thousands of families joined this movement. Across the regions of Gujarat, Malwa, and the Deccan, the sound of this group's spiritual revival spread. Such was the zeal for piety that during prayer hours, cities fell silent and men could be seen only in the mosques.

Badayuni, who had seen Shaykh 'Ala'i in his youth, records:

"When he set out for Hajj, seven hundred families accompanied him. My father met him in Peshawar and witnessed his majesty."

But how could the worldly clerics and jurists tolerate such reformers and lovers of God?

"Thieves and murderers may find peace in their company, but for the reformers of the Ummah, there is neither safety nor justice."

"We have neither shed blood nor harmed anyone

Our only crime is that we fell in love with Your beauty."

In 956 A.H. (1549 CE), when Salim Shah Sur ascended the throne of Agra and MakhdoomulMulk Mulla Abdullah Sultanpuri (d. 990 A.H.) became ShaykhulIslam, persecution began. MakhdoomulMulk incited the public, declaring the Mahdavis misguided and heretical.

He even warned the king:

"If Muhammad Jaunpuri was the Mahdi, your rule cannot stand. The Mahdi is destined to govern the entire world; since these men are his followers, they must be plotting to seize India."

"MakhdoomulMulk thus persuaded Salim Shah that these men claimed Mahdihood and that the Mahdi would become ruler of the entire earth, and since many of the army favored them, it posed a danger to the kingdom."²⁰

However, neither Shaykh Niyazi nor Shaykh 'Ala'i ever claimed to be the Mahdi. They only regarded Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri as the Mahdi and interpreted the traditions

concerning his rule metaphorically believing that the Mahdi and his followers would revive the Sharia through knowledge and action, not through political power.

Though their interpretation was incorrect in light of Hadith, it clearly indicated that they renounced worldly authority altogether. Accusing them of rebellion was therefore a blatant fabrication.

But since Salim Shah could not act politically without framing them as a threat, MakhdoomulMulk and other worldly scholars revived the ageold method of 'Ulama alSu'instigating rulers against the saints. The credulous Afghan ruler quickly turned hostile.

Muntakhab alTawarikh narrates how MakhdoomulMulk fabricated a legal case for execution:

"This innovator claims Mahdihood, and since the Mahdi is destined to be the sole ruler of the earth, he must be put to death for sedition."²¹

Eventually, Salim Shah summoned Shaykh 'Ala'i to Agra for interrogation. Several eminent scholars, including Syed Rafi'uddin Muhaddith and Shaykh Abu alFath Thamiri, were also invited for debate.

When Shaykh 'Ala'i appeared before the royal court with his companions dressed in torn robes and bearing the humility of true dervishes their presence radiated such spiritual majesty that even the courtiers felt dwarfed.

He offered only the prescribed greeting of peace, then sat silently in a corner, casting a disdainful glance over the assembly of proud courtiers as though they were stones, not men.

This composure offended Salim Shah deeply. When the debate began, Shaykh 'Ala'i recited several verses of the Qur'an and began a sermon on their meaning:

"I play no melody but the song of divine love."

Badayuni writes:

"His sermon was mostly about the condemnation of worldly life, the reality of the Hereafter, the hypocrisy of worldly clerics, and the responsibilities of rulers. His words were so powerful that they pierced every heart like arrows. Even Salim Shah and his nobles, despite their hardened hearts, could not restrain their tears."

Seeing this, Salim Shah was moved and said:

"With such knowledge and virtue, why are people against you?"

Shaykh 'Ala'i replied:

"The heart that is imprisoned by worldly longing knows no sin other than expressing the love of God."

When food from the royal kitchen was sent to him, he refused it, saying:

"This food is the right of the Muslims, but the king consumes more than his lawful share."

The next day, another debate was held. All the court scholars sat on one side, while these poor dervishes sat on the other.

Whoever spoke was soon silenced. When MakhdoomulMulk attempted to argue, Shaykh 'Ala'i rebuked him:

"You are among the worldly scholars, thieves of religion, and perpetrator of countless unlawful acts; you are outside the circle of justice, and even now, the sound of musical instruments can be heard openly from your house."²²

Persecution and Martyrdom of Shaykh 'Ala'i and Shaykh 'Abdullah Niyazi

Witnessing the course of the debate, Salim Shah became convinced that all the scholars ('ulama) had unjustly turned against a humble and truthloving dervish. Yet he was powerless to intervene; the populace was under the influence of those very clerics, and since the issue was religious, he could not directly interfere.²³

Soon after, reports began to spread: "Such and such nobleman has become the Shaykh's disciple," and "Such and such emir, upon hearing his sermon, has renounced his wealth and home."

Eventually, Salim Shah decided to limit the punishment to banishment and ordered Shaykh 'Ala'i to leave for the Deccan. The Shaykh calmly recited the Qur'anic verse: "Indeed, the earth of Allah is vast."²⁴

and set out toward the Deccan.

But the bloodthirsty rage of the worldly clerics was not yet appeased. Within a few days, they reignited agitation, spreading inflammatory rumors and pressuring the king to execute Shaykh 'Ala'i.

His "crime," they said, was that wherever he went, people gathered around him in great numbers. Even in exile, thousands including Bahar Khan, the governor of Handia, and many people across the Deccan became his followers and admirers.

Consequently, Shaykh 'Ala'i was once again summoned to Agra.

It seems that by this time, Salim Shah had begun to perceive the selfish motives and jealousies of the court scholars, especially MakhdoomulMulk. Realizing that their opinions were not sincere, the king referred the matter to Shaykh Budha Bihari, a distinguished scholar of the time, writing that his judgment should be considered final. According to Mulla Abdul Qadir Badayuni, Shaykh Budha initially wrote a fair and truthful response, stating:

"Belief in the Mahdi is neither an essential part of faith nor of Islam. The traditions regarding the signs of the Mahdi vary and are full of contradictions. Therefore, excommunication (takfir) or punishment of a learned man on this ground is unjustified."

However, soon worldly temptation clouded his judgment. His sons advised him, saying:

"Today, MakhdoomulMulk is ShaykhulIslam. It is unwise to contradict him. If you oppose him, he may persuade Salim Shah to summon you to Agra for further inquiry a burdensome journey in your old age."

These words swayed Shaykh Budha's heart. He tore up his first letter and sent another message instead:

"MakhdoomulMulk is among the learned and investigating scholars of our time. His word is speech; his verdict is law."

As the poet says:

"Such is the tyranny of the Day of Judgment none will question the oppressors." Salim Shah, though deeply wounded by Shaykh 'Ala'i's persecution, was not himself a scholar. He had hoped that a learned and truthful man would support the Shaykh and thus save him from the clutches of the deceitful clerics. Alas, all turned out to be worshipers of nafs (self) and dunyā (worldly gain).

When even Shaykh Budha Bihari sided with MakhdoomulMulk, the king, feeling helpless, handed Shaykh 'Ala'i's case over to MakhdoomulMulk.

At this time, Shaykh 'Ala'i was gravely ill suffering from a deep wound in his throat and the long journey from Bihar had left him nearly lifeless. MakhdoomulMulk cruelly ordered that he be flogged. At the third lash, the saintly Shaykh's soul departed to meet his Creator.

"In a seat of truth, near the Sovereign, the AllPowerful." ²⁵

Mulla Abdul Qadir Badayuni derived the date of his death from the Qur'anic phrase

"as 957 A.H. (1550 CE). وَسَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا.

"If I am slain for love, I count it a favor

But, O Lord, what is the sin of the unfeeling ascetic that leaves me bewildered?"

Even after his death, the oppressors were not satisfied. His mutilated body was treated worse than the corpses of the slain pagans at Badr and Uhud.

Badayuni writes:

"His body was tied to an elephant's feet and dragged through the camp. The pieces were paraded before the army, and a guard was set to prevent burial."

The Martyrdom of Shaykh Abdullah Niyazi

The story of Shaykh 'Ala'i's spiritual mentor, Shaykh Abdullah Niyazi, is no less tragic or instructive.

Badayuni narrates that soon after Shaykh 'Ala'i's exile to the Deccan, Salim Shah marched north toward Punjab to suppress an Afghan rebellion. When the royal army reached Bayana, MakhdoomulMulk, ever eager to destroy the saints of God, seized the opportunity and said to the king:

"We have rid ourselves of the minor trouble, namely Shaykh 'Ala'i, but the greater danger still remains."

Salim Shah asked, "Who is that?"

He replied, "Shaykh Abdullah Niyazi, who resides here in Bayana the spiritual guide of Shaykh 'Ala'i."

The king sent an order to Miyan Bahru Luhani, the governor of Bayana, commanding him to arrest the Shaykh immediately. Bahru was himself a disciple of Shaykh Niyazi. He pleaded with the Shaykh to flee secretly, promising to offer an excuse to the king. But the Shaykh replied calmly:

"The decree of God is the same everywhere whether here or there, whatever is destined shall come to pass."

He was therefore taken before the king. Salim Shah was mounted, preparing to march. When Shaykh Abdullah appeared, he raised his head boldly and greeted:

"Assalamu 'alaykum (Peace be upon you)."

Miyan Bahru, attempting to protect him, whispered:

"One does not greet kings like that you must bow."

At this, Shaykh Abdullah thundered:

"The greeting prescribed by the Prophet and offered by his Companions is this and none other shall I use!"

Enraged, Salim Shah gestured, and the soldiers began to beat him mercilessly with sticks, whips, and kicks until he fell unconscious.

As long as he remained conscious, the Shaykh's lips kept moving with this Qur'anic supplication:

"Our Lord, forgive us our sins and our excesses in our affairs, make firm our steps, and grant us victory over the disbelieving people." ²⁶When the king asked what he was saying, MakhdoomulMulk deceitfully replied:

"He is calling us disbelievers."

This enraged the king even more, and he ordered the beating to continue until death was certain.

"Surely, he will soon depart from this world the first among lovers to die in Thy path."

The Hypocrisy and Fate of MakhdoomulMulk

This same MakhdoomulMulk, during his tenure as ShaykhulIslam, amassed so much gold that even the number of keys to his treasure chests was uncountable. After his death, when his house was searched, gold bricks were found buried beneath the family tombs.

Payment of zakat (alms) was burdensome for him, yet to fulfill the letter of the law, he devised a clever trick every eleventh month, he would gift his wealth to his wife, who would then "gift" it back to him, thus avoiding the obligation altogether.

But divine justice overtook him even in this world.

During Emperor Akbar's reign, the same MakhdoomulMulk once feared for the power of his pen that had sealed the fate of saints was humiliated publicly. Mulla Mubarak Nagauri, father of Abu'lFazl and Faizi, once victimized by him, gained favor in Akbar's court. As retribution, MakhdoomulMulk lived to see his moral corruption judged openly by young scholars like Haji Ibrahim Sirhindi and Shaykh Abu'lFazl, forced to account for each of his past misdeeds.

His rival in worldliness, Shaykh Abdul Nabi, engaged in pamphlet wars against him. Finally, Akbar, disgusted with both, sent them to perform Hajj. They remained in the Holy Land for three years quarreling even there and on their return, according to Khazinat alAsfiya, Akbar had MakhdoomulMulk poisoned to death.

However, the death date given there (1006 A.H.) appears inaccurate.²⁷

"MakhdoomulMulk died in Ahmadabad. Qazi Ali was appointed to investigate his property. So many treasures and hoards were discovered that even their keys could not be counted. Among them were gold bricks found buried in his family graveyard. What remained with the people, only God knows. The recovered gold and valuables were transferred to the royal treasury."

“From the prayer rug of piety I rose, burdened with deceit;
O, if the world knew the truth of my hypocrisy!”

Summary

This account makes it clear that Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri never claimed prophethood, nor did he issue any decree to abandon prayer, fasting, or pilgrimage. He was a sincere, devout, and practicing scholar, known for his piety. All his contemporaries held him in high regard, praising his learning and virtue. None criticized him in a way that could tarnish his reputation. The question then arises: How did he become regarded as the founder of the Mahdavi movement?

The evidence shows that later followers constructed a sect around his name, inventing doctrines and attributing them falsely to him even though none of those beliefs can be traced directly or authentically to Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri himself.

References

- ¹ (Ain-i-Akbari, Vol. III, p. 174, Usmania University Press, Hyderabad Deccan, 1938)
- ² (Tazkira, p. 40, Miri Library, Lahore, 1960)
- ³ (Qur'an 3:92)
- ⁴ (Qur'an 2:94)
- ⁵ (Mulla Abdul Qadir Badayuni, Muntakhab al-Tawarikh, Vol. I, pp. 247–248, Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow/Delhi)
- ⁶ (Ashi'at al-Lam'at, Vol. 4, under the chapter on the Mahdi, Delhi/Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press)
- ⁷ (Tazkira, pp. 30–33)
- ⁸ (Nuzhat al-Khawahir, Vol. 5, pp. 205–206, by 'Allamah 'Abd al-Hayy al-Hasani)
- ⁹ (Muntakhab al-Tawarikh, Vol. II, pp. 305–306)
- ¹⁰ (Tazkira, pp. 40–41)
- ¹¹ (Al-Baqarah, 2:5)
- ¹² (Al-Najm, 53:3–4)
- ¹³ (Fussilat, 41:42)
- ¹⁴ (Al-An'ām, 6:93)
- ¹⁵ (Al-Baqarah, 2:285)
- ¹⁶ (Qur'an 2:273)
- ¹⁷ (Mulla Abdul Qadir Badayuni, Muntakhab al-Tawarikh, Vol. I, p. 397)
- ¹⁸ (Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad, Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Urdu Science Board, Lahore, 1990, p. 217)
- ¹⁹ (Tarikh-e-Sar Kashi, Ahl-e-Bijnor, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Nida-tul-Musannifeen, Delhi, Urdu Bazar, p. 18)
- ²⁰ (Tabaqat-i-Akbari, p. 238)
- ²¹ (Haji Muhammad Hashimi Khorasani, Muntakhab al-Tawarikh, Vol. I, p. 400, Islamiyah Bookstore, Tehran, 1388 A.H.)
- ²² (Muntakhab al-Tawarikh, Vol. I, p. 301)
- ²³ (Adapted from “Tārīkh-e-Sarkashī,” Ahl-e-Bijnor, by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Nadwat al-Muṣannifīn, Delhi, Urdu Bazar, p. 30)
- ²⁴ (Surah al-'Ankabut, 29:56)
- ²⁵ (Qur'an 54:55)
- ²⁶ (Qur'an 3:147)
- ²⁷ Badayuni writes in his Muntakhab al-Tawarikh (Vol. II, p. 311 Lucknow edition, Nawal Kishore Press):