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"The Muslim Herald" is the official organ of the London Mosque, which is open for discussion on topics relating to different religions, on the role of Islam in the modern world, and on the problems facing mankind and their relationship with Islam.

Shah Nematullah the Saint and his Qaseeda

(Maulana Dost Muhammad Shahid—Rabwah)

About 800 years ago there lived, in the vicinity of Delhi, a great sage named Nematullah, the Saint, reputed to be a very righteous man and a recipient of divine inspiration and visions. His famous divine poem predicting the advent of Imam Mahdi is an ever-living testimony of his spiritual exaltedness and is deeply rooted in the memory of a great many people for the last few centuries. This poem also came under print about a hundred years ago.

Verses of the Qaseeda

In this sub-continent this poem was first published by Shah Ismail, the martyr and successor to Sayyed Ahmad of Bareli, the 'Mujaddid' or the Reformer of the thirteenth century Hijra. It appeared in his book entitled "Al-Arba'een fee Ahwal-ul-Mahdiyyeen" which was published in Misri Ganj, Calcutta on 25th^A Muharram, 1268 corresponding to 21st November, 1881. There were 55 verses of this poem—almost everyone is a glorious prediction. We give below the translation of the first eight verses:

1. I witness the wonders of the Omnipotent God as I see the shape of things to come.
2. I do not talk about these things on any astronomical conjectures but I have been shown these divine visions.
3. At the turn of "GHAIN-O-Ray" (i.e. 1200) years (of the Hijra) many strang things shall come to pass.
4. A new coin shall be minted the intrinsic value of which shall be far less than its face value.
5. When the period of unfruitfulness shall have passed,

I visualise the appearing of the bright shining sun of the spring season.

6. After the ministry of the Promised Messiah shall have ended successively, his son, who shall be his prototype, shall follow him in his footsteps and shall thus recall to mind the days of his illustrious father.

7. I read "A—H—M—D" in my vision, which no doubt is the name of that illustrious one.

8. I see that both offices of "THE MAHDI OF THE TIME" and that of "THE PROMISED MESSIAH" shall concur in one and the same person.

Heavenly evidence

Apart from the internal and external evidence in favour of the said Qaseeda, there is another authentic proof of its being heavenly inspired. The time of the advent of Mahdi that has been pointed out in this poem exactly coincides with the time predicted in the Traditions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.S.) as well as that hinted by the latter saints. The Traditions mention "Al-Ayaat B'ad-al-Meatain" (Mishkat: chapter: Ashraat-us-Sa'at). And Mulla Ali Qari the renowned Hanifite scholar, has commented that the 'ALIF' and 'LAAM' occurring in 'Al-Meat-ain' denote that after the lapse of two hundred years subsequent to the first thousand years of the Muslim era, signs of the coming of Mahdi shall become manifest and that would be the time of his appearance.

Sha Wali Ullah of Delhi who topped the list of the renowned scholars of India, has mentioned about this in his book 'TAFHEEMAAT-I-ILAHIA'. He said, "Almighty Allah, has guided me to the fact that the last days are fast approaching and the advent of the Mahdi is about to take place". The learned scholar deduced the date of advent from the word "CHIRAGHDIN" which is 1268. Qazi Sana Ullah of Panipat also mentioned in his book, "Saif-i-Maslool" that according to the conjectures and surmise of various learned scholars, both temporal and spiritual, the advent of Imam Mahdi should happen in the beginning of the thirteenth century". (Hujaj-ul-Kirama: edited by Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan of Kannauj: page 394).

At the end of the book "Al-Arbaeen Fe Ahwal-ul-Mahdiyyeen" it is also clearly mentioned that according to Shah

Abdul Aziz, "The Mahdi is to be expected after 1200 Hijra and that he is to be born in the beginning of the century". (page: 44).

The Poem and its author

The author after quoting the poem in his book adds:

"Nematullah, the saint, a man of high spiritual attainments, was very well known in India, had his home in the vicinity of Delhi. According to his own 'Diwan' (collection of poems) he lived about 560 A.H. and his poem is very well known all over India. These verses have been quoted in this book as these deal with the subject of Mahdi's advent". (25th Muharram, 1268).

Wrong Attribution

Great injustice has been done to the Qaseeda and its author. Owing to some misunderstanding or due to a hidden motive. this poem, intentionally or unwittingly, was, in the nineteenth century, attributed to his namesake Shah Nematullah of Kirman who was born in Iran about 200 years after him and who visited the Bahmani kindom in South India. He was a contemporary of king Ahmad Shah Bahmani. His tomb is ^{at} Mahan near Kirman and is constantly visited by a host of his admirers. His lineage, through sixteen generations reaches to Sayyad Abdul Qadir, Ghaus-ul-Azum. A short account of his life is also found in "Tareekh-i-Frishta", an authentic source of Islamic history. His date of death is given to be 834 A.H. or 1431 A.D." (Vol.: Discourse 3 Rauza I: page 329: published in Cawnpur).

Mufti Ghulam Sarwar, the historian of Lahore, on page 115 of his book "Khazina-tul-Asfia" printed in 1290 A.H. or 1873 A.D. and also the learned Shibli in his book "Sher-ul-'Ajam" part V, confirmed this to be the date of his death and neither of these authors attributed this Qaseeda to Nematullah Shah of Kirman.

The famous orientalist, Professor Edward G. Brown, visited the tomb of Shah Nematullah of Kirman at Mahan on 9th August, 1888. There, an attendant gave him an adultrated copy of the above mentioned Qaseeda in which a few verses had been

added and some alterations had been done. For instance there was "AIN-O-RAY DAAL" in the place of "GHAIN-O-RAY DAAL" and "ALIF HAA MEEM DAAL" had been changed to "MEEM HAA MEEM DAAL".

In his *Literary History of Persia* published in 1920, Professor Brown, while giving an account of the life of Shah Nematullah of Kirman, also attributed this poem to him. But in all fairness, it must be mentioned that the Professor has unhesitatingly admitted that this poem is not included in the 'Complete Works' of the said poet printed in Tehran in 1276 A.H. or 1860 A.D. a copy of which he had in his possession. He wrote, "The poem is not to be found at all in the lithographed edition". (Ibid: Vol. 3: page 468: 3rd Edition: under Nematullah of Kirman).

Background of the Interpolation

On page 465 of his *"Literary History of Persia"*, Professor Brown said that during his stay at Kirman, some members of the Baabi sect used to tell him that the event of Baab (1260 A.H. 1844 A.D.) had been predicted in this poem. This statement is indeed very interesting and carries great significance. It provides a weighty clue and points out the true cause why the poem was attributed to Shah Nematullah of Kirman and by whom the word "AHMAD" was replaced by "MOHAMMAD" and why the figure "1200" was altered to "1260"? and why the actual words of the verse were changed to "GHAIN RAY SEEN CHOON GUZASHT AZ SAAL?"

Qaseeda attributed to Khwaja Nematullah of Haansi

By the end of the nineteenth century (A.D.) the fame of this poem had reached far and wide to India and Iran. But after the first World War when the Allied powers smashed the Turkish Empire into pieces and when the Congress leaders in India voted for the Non-Co-operation Movement, the Muslims in India^d heard for the first time that there were two poems in Persian composed by Nematullah of Haansi* and after the lapse of a

*The translation of one these poems ending with "Paida Shavad", had already been printed in the "Calcutta Review" Vol. 51: pages 386-7, 1870.

few years when the public had become familiar with the new idea of another two poems, these were published in March, 1931 at Amritsar along with the genuine poem of Shah Nematullah, the Saint of Delhi, in a book entitled "A Cursory Review on Modern Education". This was how the lettered public was introduced to the new idea through this literary adventure". By this time the "Literary History of Persia" had become fairly known and Muslim writers, on the basis of predictions, were anxiously awaiting the advent of the Mahdi. From the beginning of the thirteenth century Hijra they started writing in the following tone:

"The Promised One is so anxiously awaited that people can hardly sleep and during the nights cry out, 'When shall we witness that day?' . . . "O God! do either grant us a long life so that we might live to see the vicar of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.S.) or show us Thy favour and send him to us now. If this be not the time of his appearance what other time would be more befitting?"

1. Today is the day of the Joust: where is our Champion Knight? Everyone is now looking at his beloved; where (O God!) is my beloved?

2. Alas! my life is being wasted in mere hopes and expectations: Allah is fully aware of my condition and how I suffer from afflictions.

3. Why must I now^t bewail for the misery and anguish of separation as my life is passing away without union with my beloved. (The Journal, "Anjuman-i-Taeed-i-Islam, Lahore: July, 1921: page 35).

The Editor of "A REVIEW ON MODERN EDUCATIONS" has, after incorporating both the poems in his book, disclosed the fact that:

"During the last Non-Cooperation Movement two more poems of this kind were also frequently published—one rhyming with "SHAVAD" and the other with "BAYANA". These contained contradictory statements and were full of historical discord. Such poems as these are, therefore, of little value".

drawn Curtain ^{drawn} over the genuine Qaseeda ~~drawn~~

Since the editor of the book mentioned above was particularly keen to distract the attention of the general public from the genuine Qaseeda of Shah Nematullah, the Saint of Delhi, he started an adverse campaign against it and said that this poem and others of that type had been purposely written at the time of the Mutiny of 1857 to appease and console the Muslims for the political collapse and were certainly not based on any divine vision or inspiration" (page: 173). But so far as the Qaseeda of "Al-Arbaeen" is concerned, the above statement is categorically incorrect. Because this poem had been published six years before the Mutiny and was copied from the genuine 'Work' of the said Saint. Its authenticity had been fully established.

The falsity exposed

Truth about the counterfeit poems and the authenticity of the Qaseeda by Shah Nematullah, the Saint, had soon become known to the men of letters. It was bound to happen so. Because all the predictions that have been recorded in the history of religions and which have already been fulfilled, do contain a certain amount of ambiguity and vagueness and are always hidden under the shroud of mystery. For this reason a learned scholar of northern India, Maulvi Ferozdin, bookseller of Lahore, wrote in his book, "Qaseeda Zahoor-i-Mahdi":

"The fact is that it is contrary to divine traditions to give definite date regarding a portending event. Right from the earliest days sages, saints and prophets have announced the coming of the 'last days' always as near at hand. The underlying idea is that the people, ~~should~~, thinking it to be fast approaching, may turn to repentance and straight living. If Adam had declared that resurrection would take place after 8,000 years, the exhortations of the latter prophets would have been of no avail. Everyone would have said, "Oh! eight thousand years is a long way off. Let us, for the present, make merry and enjoy". It is possible that some people may call this view to be derogatory to the prophets. Let it, therefore, be known that matters relating to the far distant age, which the spiritually exalted ones see in visions, do appear to them to be near at hand. Fixing the number of days, months and years is only for our rough guidance.

Since they do actually see things in visions, these could not be called pertaining to a far distant date”.

“The Holy Quran also mentions the “Last Days” in this very manner i.e. It is very near. This is most effective and opportune for the erring people to reform themselves. That is why no prophet has ever fixed a set date for the occurrence of a predicted event. At the same time this is also correct that in very exceptional cases the prophet gives a hint privately to one of his trusted companions about the date of a certain coming event. For instance once Anas, a companion of the Holy Prophet said to his master that with his permission he would very much like to announce the names of those who were to enter paradise definitely, and also of those who were, without doubt, to go to hell. But the Holy Prophet forbade him to do so” (Qaseeda Zahoor-i-Mahdi with the Life of Shah Nematullah: 28-30: 2nd edition: printed at Feroz Printing Works, outside Sheranwalla Gate, Lahore).

The said learned Maulvi Feroz Din, while discussing both the poems attributed to Nematullah Haanswi, has commented thus;

“A few more poems of this kind are also known to and are prevalent among the general public. For instance, there is the one which rhymes as, “PAIDA SHAVAD”...” Raast goyam padshahi do jahan paida shavad”. The composer of this poem has also predicted, with a little difference, very many things. It is not only most unfair to attribute this poem to Shah Nematullah of Kirman but also indicates ignorance of the first magnitude on the part of the composer. This poem refers only to India in which he starts mentioning Ameer Taimoor, and goes as far as Muazzam Shah, naming each and every Moghul King. But later he gets confused and is unable to go beyond Akbar II”.

“Another poem of this kind is also known in which the names of Habibullah and Nasrullah (the deceased king of Afghanistan and his brother) are also mentioned and which a certain person in Bhopal also tried to ascribe to Nasrullah Khan Bahadur, the heir apparent of that State. But scholars and critics

are fully aware of the worthlessness of such poems However, it is absolutely useless to ascribe poems to Shah Nematullah of Kirman in which the names of the kings of India or its neighbouring country Afghanistan are mentioned" (Qaseeda Zahoor-i-Mahdi: pages 34, 35 and 36).

Adulterated Qaseeda in 1948

Pakistan came into being on 14th August, 1947. On 17th August, only one day previous to the Idd-ul-Fitr, the obnoxious Radcliff Award portioned out the sub-districts of Batala, Pathankot and Gurdaspur to India in a most unfair and arbitrary manner, although each of the sub-districts was a Muslim majority area. Following this unjust division of the land, the Hindus and the Sikhs of India mercilessly slaughtered the unarmed Muslims of East Punjab. Moreover a number of large cities, representing Islamic culture and background, were taken away from the Muslims. Even Delhi, which had remained the seat of Muslim rule for so many centuries, was turned into a slaughterhouse where Muslim blood flowed freely in the streets and which was made a second Karbala. At the time of this great tragedy, some opportunists published a poem of 46 verses rhyming with "Bayana" and which was falsely ascribed to Khwaja Nematullah and was, during the Non-Cooperation Movement days, published in the "Daily Zamindar" and the "Daily Shahbaz" in 1948 with an addition of fifteen or sixteen verses. The new verses dealt with the Partition of India and stated that the largest city of India shall be taken away from them in which they shall be mercilessly slaughtered. This shall happen between the two 'Eid festivals. But the Muslims shall again take up their swords in the month of Muharram and recapture India. And because at that time the kingdom of the Nizam was still in existence, another verse was thoughtlessly added which said:

"After this a great hue and cry shall be raised in India and Osman shall be on the scene with war-like intentions".

But alas! the State of the Nizam of Hyderabad capitulated to the Indian army on the 18th September which put a seal to the fact that the poem was indeed fraudulent.

'Daily Imroz' criticised

To publish a fictitious poem with the intent to ascribe the same to Shah Nematullah, the Saint, was indeed a deplorable venture. The Muslim Press of the Punjab raised a strong protest against this repugnant speculation. The "Daily Imroz" in its issue of 19th July, 1948, commented adversely in the following words:

"Much publicity has, lately, been given to the Qaseeda of Shah Nematullah, the Saint, and many a newspaper has printed it with commentary while introductory notes have also been given about the life and times of the said poet. It was said that Shah Nematullah, who wrote this Qaseeda 759 years ago, also visited Bedar during the time of Bahmani rule in South India. THIS WOULD MEAN THAT THE POEM WAS COMPOSED AT THE END OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY A.D. AND THAT THE SAID SAINT VISITED INDIA TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AFTER IT WAS COMPOSED. Because the Bahmani dynaty got established about 200 years after the Qaseeda was composed. If both these statements be accepted as true, it would mean that the said Saint lived for more than 250 years. But Shah Nematullah, who is generally known as Shah Nematullah of Kohistan, was not a such obscure personality for whom we should indulge in far fetched conjectures. He is a prominent and distinguished personality of the fifteenth century. There appears to be a difference of some 300 years between the composition of the poem and the time when Shah Nematullah lived.... Shah Nematullah was not known only for his piety and righteousness but was also a renowned poet. Historians and biographers hold him in great esteem and speak very highly of his works. He is a mystic poet of the same calibre as Sinai: Attar; Maulvi Roomi; Iraqui; Auhadi; Sultan Abu Saied; Abul Khair and others. His verses are melodious and full of rythm, his language is polished, clear and simple—a quality common to all poets of his age".

The poem that has been attributed to Shah Nematullah and in which the partition of India; the murder of Gandhi and a great world war have been predicted, could not, so far as the language and literary standard is concerned, possibly be ascribed to an accredited and renowned poet like Shah Nematullah of

Kohistan: Let us examine a few of the verses:

1. "Sisters with brothers; and sons with their mothers and even fathers with their daughters shall be criminally related in love".

2. "A great city shall be turned into a slaughter house and the old scenes of the battle of Karbala shall be repeated in each and every house.

3. "When the month of Muharram comes, the Muslims shall take up their swords to act aggressively.

4. "And a person named Habibullah, the blessed one from Allah, shall, with God's grace, take his sword out of the scabbard".

Even if we overlook the erroneous use of the Persian idiom in these verses, we are faced with the fact that most of the verses are completely out of rhyme. As for example, the words "neez ham" occur twice in these verses and in both lines the letter 'H' is silent. The use of the term "Iqdam-i-Jarihana" is a glaring proof that this is not the language of the time of Shah Nematullah. Because this is a journalistic term and was coined only about 30 to 35 years ago. In short the language of this poem is extremely poor and we would hesitate a thousand times before calling it 'Persian language'".

"This Qaseeda is well known in the Punjab, the Frontier Provinces and the Kashmir since a long time. At one time it also contained a prediction about the advent of the "DAJJAAL" (the antichrist) and the advent of the Mahdi. But now it forecasts the division of India, the murder of Gandhi and the communal riots. It was understood that the words "Habibullah—the blessed one from Allah" pointed to Amir Habibullah Khan, the king of Afghanistan. Now this line is supposed to apply to Qaid-i-Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah".

"In short the above discussion makes it crystal clear that this poem was certainly not composed by Shah Nematullah of Kohistan. Its language is impure and incorrect; while most of the lines are out of rhyme and many of these include words which were coined by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan for his trans-

lation work. Although this Qaseeda exists since a very long time, it has recently been published with additional unauthenticated verses". ("DAILY IMROZ", dated 19th July, 1948: quoted from "ALFAZAL", Lahore, dated 20th July, 1948, page: 2).

Research from Azamgarh

Mr. Abdul Shakoor, a well-known writer of Pakistan has stated:

"During the disturbed conditions of the country subsequent to the partition of India, this Qaseeda was also published in the monthly, "QINDEEL" of Karachi with the caption, "THE DEFEAT OF INDIA". Someone sent a cutting of the same to the "Ma'arif" of Azamgarh with the following questions:

1. Whether that was the genuine Qaseeda of ~~the~~ Shah Nematulla the Saint of Delhi?
2. What is the truth about the poem that has been published?"

The reply to the above question was published on page 145 of the issue of February, 1948. (No. 2: Vol: 61). The writer of this article has, in his possession a copy of this issue. According to this reply, the poem in question is fabricated, fictitious and has nothing to do with the original Qaseeda of Shah Sahib and is not to be found in any old collections nor is based on any other published genuine poem. We give below an extract from the above article:

"... There is an internal evidence of its being a fabrication which can be seen in the lines of this poem. In the first place every verse of this poem is written in Indian-style-Persian and is totally different from the language of the time of Shah Nematullah. There are a number of words in this poem which were never used in those days in the meaning implied. Moreover some of the countries mentioned in the poem were not known by that name at the time of Shah Nematullah. For instance, JAPAN has been mentioned several times. But this island was not known by that name at that time. The name of "JAPAN" was given to it after the visit of Marco Polo to China in the year 1295 A.D. The Chinese used to call this island by the name of 'CHIPEN-

KUE' which was later changed into 'CHIPANGI'. And in the English language it began to be called "JAPAN". (Japan by David Murray). It is apparent that the contemporaries of Shah Nematullah would not possibly know this name as it was coined centuries later. They could not talk so freely of the war between Russia and Japan and the disastrous earthquake. This poem and its publication serves only one purpose—to confuse the minds of the Muslims and to enmesh them in wishful thinking about their future. It is not to be found in any ancient manuscripts nor is based on any other printed work. It is only a fictitious fabrication". ("Ma'arif": February, 1948. Quoted from "Daily Jang", Rawalpindi: dated 25th December, 1971: page: 3).

A veracious statement

The manager of Dar-ul-Isha'at, Uloom-i-Islamia, Hussain Agahi, Multan, had in the introduction of his booklet, "The Poems of Khwaja Nematullah", very forcefully stated that:

"Critics of repute have stated that the first Qaseeda is genuine and its verses have not been interpolated and the words, "MAY BEENAM" are genuine and guarantee its authenticity. The other two poems are grafted fabrications" (page: 3).

Republication of the fictitious poem in 1948 1948

We have exposed the falsity of the two poems which have been fraudently published in the name of Shah Nematullah during the last fifty years. The idea was to supplant the genuine poem. The height of absurdity is that the fictitious poem which was published in 1948, has again appeared in the Press recently and the "author", with one stroke of the pen, has been made a contemporary of Jehangir and Shahjehan. The publishers do believe that the general public will readily swallow the new claim that Shah Nemat Ullah had written two thousand verses regarding the vicissitudes of the present age". (page: 5. the "Daily Mashriq" dated 21st December, 1971). In other words this is a warning that so long as the number of fictitious verses does not reach two thousand this deplorable forgery and fabrication shall be continued.

(Rendered in English by M. A. Ghauri)