

The Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore (U.K.)
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A Retrospective Look at the Ahmadiyya Movement

by Shaikh Sharif Ahmad

The political downfall of the Muslims all over the world, from Morocco to Malaya, in the nineteenth century C.E. left the adherents of Islam stunned. In India the Mughal empire, one of the mightiest the world had ever seen, went down crumbling like a house of cards before the might of the British. The Caliphate of Turkey, once a dread from Austria to Arabia, had become the "sick man of Europe", its days having been numbered. In political crusade, the Muslims had lost almost everything to Europe.

To discredit Islam in the eyes of the Muslims and to place the last seal on the fate of the followers of the Last Prophet, wave after wave of Christian missionaries was despatched to the Middle and the Far East with virtual mountains of abusive, vituperative and venomous literature against the Holy Prophet, the Holy Quran and all that the Muslims held dear. Before that, Muslim armies had lost the battlefield, but they held fast their faith. Here the Muslim '*Ulama* were laying down arms before the Christian missionaries. Instead of marshalling their capabilities to fight the new onslaught, they sat down in the mosques to pray to Allah to send down Jesus Christ from heaven to eliminate the disbelievers with the blows of his breath. The Muslims, inspired and led by the '*Ulama*, had for sometime been praying for the appearance of the Mahdi to deliver Islam from the sword of Christians. And a man claiming to be the Mahdi did appear from the sands of Sudan. But unfortunately he fell into the hands of those very people from whom he was to deliver the Muslims. In his assassination, the world of Islam lost the last hope. All their prayers for the advent of

Jesus Christ were used by the Christian missionaries against Islam. If the world was to be freed from tyranny and sin by Jesus, son of Mary (who was sitting on the right hand of God), and not by Muhammad, why should the world not prepare itself to receive Jesus with open arms when he drops from above under the directions of the All-Wise and Almighty. Muhammad had no part to play, the Christian missionaries asserted. This one argument was so devastating that hundreds of thousands of Muslims in almost all the countries in which they were living and where Christian missionaries had placed their foot, embraced Christianity and forsook Islam.

Not only did the Muslim scholars give way before the Christian missionaries, they also fell flat when facing intellectual upheaval. Advancement of science changed the minds and thinking. A large chunk of the educated class refused believing in mere dogmas and started viewing life and its problems pragmatically. Only a practical approach to a problem could appeal to the intelligentsia. Our theologians, on the other hand, were still clinging to Greek philosophy as adapted during the Abbaside period, which the modern sciences had summarily rejected. The belief that the Quran was revealed remained a dogma unless it was proved. When it could not be proved, the famous Muslim educationist and social reformer Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) declared the Quran to be the inner voice of the holy heart of the Holy Prophet. Thus the true concept of revelation, from the Holy Prophet's time to the end of the 13th century *Hijra*, sank into the background and lost its significance. This was tantamount to a denial of the Holy Quran as the word of Allah, and thus all the prophecies and preaching embodied therein were reduced to the position of pious wishes and speculations.

Taking a leaf out of the books of Christian missionaries, the newly formed Hindu sect, known as the *Arya Samaj*, made the Holy Prophet's person a target of attack. The objections raised by the Christians were repeated by the Arya Samajists in vilifying the Quran and Islam. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad not only convincingly refuted their charges, but also exposed the hollowness of their arguments and the disgraceful nature of some of their beliefs such as *niyog*. Hazrat Mirza sahib's campaign against the Arya Samaj reduced its popularity, and within a few years the movement faded away.

Revolution through literature

Sermons from a pulpit or a platform cause a stir for a short while, and are then promptly forgotten. It was the Christian and Arya literature that had wrought havoc in Muslim society. Hazrat Mirza sahib had been defending

Islam by writing articles in various journals of India before declaring himself a *Mujaddid*. The first book he wrote was *Barāhīn Ahmadiyya*, wherein he not only refuted charges against Islam, but he presented to the world the beauties of the religion of Islam. He wrote not only with the pen of a great scholar, but also with the vision and insight of a great saint, having already travelled deep into the Unseen, and capable of carrying with him anyone desirous of seeing that realm with his own eyes.

Maulvi Muhammad Husain Batalvi, a leader of the *Ahl Hadith* sect of Muslims, eulogized the author and the book in a lengthy review in which he remarked:

“In our opinion, this book in this age, and to meet the present circumstances, is such that the like of it has not been written up to this time in Islam, and nothing can be said about the future . . .”

(We discuss other literature produced by the Ahmadiyya movement in subsequent pages.)

Claim as a Mujaddid and Messiah

It was towards the end of this book (published in 4 parts from 1880 to 1884) that Hazrat Mirza sahib mentioned that he had been appointed by Allah to be the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the fourteenth century *Hijra* (which began in 1883). The institution of *Mujaddids* is based on the Saying of the Holy Prophet as follows:

“Verily, Allah shall raise for this *Umma*, at the beginning of every one hundred years, one who will reform for it its religion.”
(*Abū Dāwūd, Kitāb as-Sunan*, vol. 2, p. 241).

Since *Mujaddids* have also passed before Hazrat Mirza sahib, no one took exception to this claim. But, on account of a revelation in 1890, he claimed that Jesus had died and that the *Mujaddid* of the fourteenth century *Hijra* had been termed as the Promised Messiah. While claiming to be the *Mujaddid*, Hazrat Mirza sahib had earlier announced:

“And the author has been given the knowledge too, that he is the *Mujaddid* of this age and that spiritually his excellences resemble those of the Messiah, son of Mary, and that the one of them bears a very strong resemblance and close affinity to the other.”
(*Ishtihār*, published 1885).

But his claim to messiahship raised a storm of opposition from the 'Ulama, who were not prepared to hear that Jesus, son of Mary, like all other prophets, had died. The Mirza sahib, however, clarified this point in his book *Ā'īnah Kamālāt Islām* as follows:

“It must be remembered that the claim of being the Promised Messiah is not in any way greater than the claim of being a recipient of Divine communications (*mulham min Allāh*) or a *Mujaddid* from God. It is evident that, in case of anybody who enjoys this status of Divine communication, all his names from Allah such as the like of Messiah or the like of Moses, are justified for him.”

(p. 340)

Claim of being Mahdi

There are a number of reports regarding the appearance of the Mahdi. Some eminent collectors and compilers of Hadith have rejected those reports. But still, an appreciable number believes them to be authentic. But the contention of Hazrat Mirza sahib was that with the advent of a Divine personality like the Messiah, there was no necessity of a Mahdi and it was for that reason that compilers like Bukhari and Muslim have not included reports about the Mahdi in their books. This assertion finds support in the reports of Ibn Maja and Hakim that:

“There is no Mahdi except 'Īsā (Jesus).”

In the opinion of Hazrat Mirza sahib, the Promised Messiah was in fact the Mahdi, although whoever was deputed by Allah for guidance was a *Mahdi* — a guide.

Denial of Prophethood

A very oft-repeated charge against Hazrat Mirza sahib is that he claimed to be a prophet. This is absolutely incorrect. His writings are full of denials, and he spent his life refuting the allegation that he ever claimed to be a prophet. Before his writings are quoted, it is appropriate to reproduce a few sentences from the great classical saint and scholar Muhiy-ud-Din Ibn Arabi (d. 1240 C.E.) from his renowned work *Futūhāt Makkiyya*, Part 2, page 79:

“From some of the sayings of a *muhaddath*, a stranger (to such matters) thinks that the former is claiming to be a prophet and is cancelling the *Shari'at* of Muhammad (may peace and the blessings of

Allah be upon him). And that stranger then brands him a *kāfir*. We have seen much of this in our own time and we have ourselves tasted of it at the hands of the '*Ulama* of our time.'

Hazrat Mirza sahib claimed to be a *muḥaddath* even before his claim of Promised Messiah. A *muḥaddath* is one to whom Allah speaks. Denying claiming to be a prophet, Hazrat Mirza sahib writes:

"I have not claimed prophethood, but I claim to be a *muḥaddath*, which I do under Divine orders."
(*Izāla Auhām*, p. 421).

"Those people have forged a lie against me, that this man claims to be a prophet."
(*Hamāmat al-Buḥrā*, p. 8).

"It is an absolute fabrication against me that I have claimed prophethood."
(*Kitāb al-Barriyya*, p. 182).

"The Promised Messiah being a *muḥaddath*, is a prophet metaphorically."
(*Izāla Auhām*, p. 349).

In his last book, he wrote:

"I have been given the name *nabī* by Allah in the metaphorical sense, not in the real sense."
(Supplement to *Ḥaqīqat al-Wahy*, p. 65).

Unfortunately, after the death of Hazrat Mirza sahib, his son Mirza Mahmud Ahmad claimed that his father was a real prophet, and in support he attributed to Hazrat Mirza sahib a strange stance — that although Allah called him a prophet, Hazrat Mirza sahib did not correctly understand the meaning of this title, and so he continued to deny claiming to be a prophet, to the extent of cursing any such claimant, including himself. Mirza Mahmud Ahmad based this fantastic theory on a small Urdu booklet written by the Promised Messiah in the year 1901. A follower of Hazrat Mirza sahib had replied to a critic, when denying that he claimed to be a prophet, that the word *nabī* had not even been used by Hazrat Mirza sahib. The reply of the follower was corrected, that the word *nabī* had actually been used, but only in a metaphorical sense, not in the real sense. He discussed the whole matter threadbare, and summed up his true position in that very pamphlet as follows:

“Now, by all this I mean that the ignorant opponents accuse me of claiming to be a prophet or messenger. I lay no such claim. I am neither a prophet nor a messenger as they think me to be. . . . I have been made a prophet and messenger by way of *burūz*.”

(*Burūz* is one who manifests the spiritual qualities of another by following him meticulously.)

Mirza Mahmud Ahmad also declared that any person who did not believe in Hazrat Mirza sahib was a *kāfir* and outside the pale of Islam. But when Hazrat Mirza did not have any claim to prophethood, no one disbelieving in him could be a *kāfir*. Only one reference from the pen of Hazrat Mirza sahib is enough to repudiate Mirza Mahmud Ahmad’s position. It is as follows:

“To call a denier of one’s claim a *kāfir* is the privilege of those prophets alone who bring from God Sharī’ah and new commandments. But as to the inspired ones other than the bearers of Sharī’ah, however great their dignity in the sight of God, and however much they may have been honoured by being spoken to by God, no one becomes a *kāfir* by denying them.”

(*Tiryāq al-Qulūb*, p. 130).

Hazrat Mirza sahib so strongly believed in the finality of prophethood in the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad that according to him the second advent of Jesus, son of Mary, was tantamount to breaking that finality.

Reforms introduced by the Movement

i) Re-union of man with God

As stated already and as claimed by himself, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was the *Mujaddid* of the fourteenth century *Hijra*. His main task was to remove the cobwebs of misunderstandings, misgivings, misconceptions and wrong notions from the fair name of Islam, and present to the world the religion of Islam in its pristine purity. The biggest and most difficult change a *Mujaddid* is required to bring about is to re-unite man with his Creator. Modern sciences and new discoveries widened the gulf between man and God. When one asserts that God speaks, one should prove it. The *Mujaddid* of the fourteenth century cried with all the force at his command that Allah was not only Hearing and Knowing, He was also Speaking. Whoever wanted a testimony should come and stay with him for a few days and verify it. While writing his review on Hazrat Mirza sahib’s first book *Barāhīn*

Ahmadiyya, Maulvi Muhammad Husain Batalvi admitted that fact of revelations received by the author of the book. Revelation is beyond the range of experience of an ordinary man, and cannot be perceived with our physical senses.

ii) Natural death of Jesus Christ

Hazrat Mirza sahib claimed and proved that Jesus, son of Mary, neither died on the cross nor was lifted bodily to heaven. After healing of his wounds, he migrated to Kashmir where he lived and died at the ripe old age of 120 years. The notion that Jesus himself would come down in the latter days was therefore wrong, and prophecies in the Hadith regarding his second advent were fulfilled in another form. The *Mujaddid* of the fourteenth century had a spiritual affinity with the original Jesus Christ, and was the Promised Messiah who was to come. Hazrat Mirza sahib thus rendered an invaluable service to the cause of Islam by unravelling the mystery of Jesus' life and death, and thus dealt a severe blow to the dogmatic Christianity prevalent at that time.

iii) Jihad — Its true meaning and spirit

A strange concept of Jihad had taken roots in the minds of the Muslims, namely, that to spread the influence of Islam, the sword was the weapon to be used. Whoever rejected Islam, when offered it, deserved to be killed. This belief was used by the Christian missionaries to dub Islam as a barbaric religion devoid of reason and argument. Hazrat Mirza sahib drew the attention of the Muslims to the true meaning of the word *Jihād*. It meant only *striving* according to the situation. If Muslims were attacked by the sword to eliminate Islam, the enemy must be fought with the sword. Otherwise, reason was the only weapon to be used. Since the opponents of Islam were attacking it, not by the sword, but by the pen, they were to be paid back in the same coin.

Thank God that the bitterest propounders of Jihad by sword have now changed their minds, and no longer believe that Islam needed compulsion for its propagation. There is no coercion or compulsion in religion, as the Quran says, has at last dawned on the Muslim intelligentsia.

iv) Ijtihād

The Holy Prophet is the Last Prophet, and the Quran is the final word of God. There are no two opinions about this. New times and new circumstances, however, required rethinking in interpreting the Holy Quran and the Hadith. But the '*Ulama* had closed the door of deductive reasoning on the plea that early Muslim scholars understood the Holy Quran, Sunnah

and Hadith better than us. They refused to come out of the cocoons woven by the *'Ulama* one thousand years ago, with the result that the Muslim intelligentsia started considering Islam as a static religion, having lost the dynamism to move with the times. There was an uproar against Hazrat Mirza sahib when he reopened the door of *ijtihad* to meet situations about which no specific authority was available in the Quran and Sunnah. But now, after eighty years, Muslim scholars and thinkers have realised that the door of *ijtihad* could not be closed.

v) Abrogation in the Holy Quran

The Holy Quran claims that there is no discrepancy in it. It says:

“And if this Book were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy.” (4:82).

Although there is no Hadith in support, yet Muslim *'Ulama* believed that certain verses cancelled or abrogated other verses. Wherever the scholars could not effect reconciliation between two verses, they considered one of them abrogated. The hollowness of this theory could be gauged from the number of such verses affected — from a high number of 500 at an earlier stage to as few as 5 verses in the opinion of Shah Wali Allah of India in the eighteenth century C.E.

It was a commendable historical service of Ahmadiyyat and its Founder to reconcile the apparent conflict on which this theory was based, and remove the cause of criticism by hostile elements that discrepancies existed in the Quran.

vi) Apostasy

An unfortunate common misconception prevailing among Muslim *'Ulama* is that in Islam apostasy is punished by death. A religion that calls upon every one to use sense cannot compel anyone to adopt a particular belief or concept. The Holy Quran, the fountainhead of Islam, is quite clear on the question of religious freedom:

“There is no compulsion in religion.” (2:256).

“Say: The truth is from your Lord; then whosoever wants to, let him believe; and whosoever wants to, let him disbelieve.” (18:30).

“O you who believe, should one of you turn back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him.” (5:54).

During the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, killing of apostates was not in vogue in Madina while the Holy Prophet was the ruler of the place. It is clear from the following verse:

“And a party of the People of the Book say: Express belief in that which has been revealed, in the first part of the day, and disbelieve at the end of it.” (3:71).

If death was the punishment for apostasy, how could a person living under a Muslim government conceive of a plan of believing in the first part of the day and rejecting in the later.

Hazrat Mirza sahib rendered a great service to Islam by removing the stigma of it being a barbaric religion which needed compulsion, coercion and the sword for its spread. It is a charge that is being repeated till this day, and the Ahmadiyya Movement continues to rebut it through pen and platform.

vii) Rule of Quran and Sunnah

There is a sect among Muslims which follows the Quran only and rejects Hadith, while another goes by what the Hadith says, even in interpreting the Quran. These sects existed during the life of Hazrat Mirza sahib. The followers of the former sect called themselves *Ahl-e Quran*, and rejected Hadith because it was compiled about 100–150 years after the death of the Holy Prophet, and a large number of inauthentic and weak reports had also found their way into the books of Hadith. But there are elucidations of Quranic injunctions in Hadith, such as timings and number of prayers, not found in the Quran. And similarly, details of *Zakāt* (poor-rate), as regards who must pay and how much, are not given in the Book, and are taken from the Hadith. To reject Hadith summarily is to deprive the Muslims of a treasure of truths and knowledge.

Hazrat Mirza sahib laid down a beautiful mean between the two extremes. He said that the Quran, being the fountainhead of Islam, should come first and reign supreme. But Muslims have to obey the Holy Prophet also. So they should follow the Sunnah as well, i.e. the practical example of the Holy Prophet. Thus Sunnah comes next to the Holy Quran. In the sequence of priorities, Hadith comes next. But it could be relied on only when it was not in conflict with the spirit of the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. If Muslims follow this sequence, a great many difficulties among them can be resolved easily.

Literary Works

The literature produced by Hazrat Mirza sahib and his Jamā'at is unique in nature, unparalleled in quality, and amazing in results. The Founder of the Movement fought against all those who fought against Islam. Author of about ninety books, big and small, in Urdu, Arabic and Persian, he not only defended Islam, but conclusively proved the hollowness of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. He convincingly proved the truth of Islam, especially to the West, and had virtually brought the whole of Europe to the threshold of Islam. Hundreds of theirs embraced Islam at a time when it was considered to be a faith of the barbaric and bedouin people.

Among the members of the Ahmadiyya Movement are luminaries who have spread the light of Islam far and wide through their literary works. A few names are given below by way of illustration.

Maulana Nur-ud-Din

A very close associate of Hazrat Mirza sahib. Suffice it to say that Maulana Muhammad Ali owes much to this intellectual and spiritual giant.

Maulana Muhammad Ali

It was he on whom Hazrat Mirza sahib pinned many hopes. Thank God that Hazrat Mirza sahib's spiritual foresight was true. He is the author of about seventy books in English and Urdu, and the first Muslim to translate the Holy Quran into English with commentary. One of his finest works is *The Religion of Islam*, first published in 1936. It has been copied by many in parts, but none could improve upon it. Maulana Muhammad Ali has entered into the realm of immortal souls.

Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din

One of the dearest followers of Hazrat Mirza sahib, he was a legal practitioner. He came to England to conduct a case in 1912, and established the Woking Muslim Mission in 1913 with the backing of the Ahmadiyya Movement. He was the first Muslim missionary to Europe in modern times. Hundreds in this country embraced Islam through his efforts, some of them being:

1. Lord Headley *al-Farooq*.
2. Habibullah Lovegrove.
3. Dudley Wright.
4. Sir Abdullah Archibald Hamilton.

5. Maulvi William Bashir Pickard.
6. Sir Umar Hubert Rankin.

Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din wrote about fifty books on Islam, mostly in English, but some in Urdu.

Maulana Sadr-ud-Din

A selfless crusader and missionary. He built the Berlin Mosque and translated the Quran into German. He wrote about sixteen books.

Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi

Scholar of Sanskrit, Hebrew and Aramaic, all dead languages. Author of several books, the best known being *Muhammad in World Scriptures*, a work unique in the history of Islam, sixty years of research spread over 1500 pages.

Khwaja Nazir Ahmad

Author of *Jesus in heaven on Earth*. An extraordinary book on an extraordinary subject, deriving extraordinary conclusions.

Missions and the Project of Translating the Quran into different languages of the world

The policy for propagating Islam was outlined by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad himself in his life-time. He aimed at translating the Holy Quran into every important language of the world. Instead of sending missionaries to different countries, he preferred literature to be sent. It enabled the reader to go through books, compare the beauties of Islam with those of his own religion and draw conclusions himself.

It was, however, soon felt that the dearth of adequate literature for a particular country needed the presence of a representative of Islam to satisfy a seeker after truth. The Movement first started a mission in Woking in 1913 (after the death of the Founder) and later in Berlin. Gradually when members in different parts of the world increased, every branch was entrusted duties of supplying literature where demand was received from. Still in the meantime, some more missions were opened in Java, Indonesia and Holland. By laying stress on literature, the object of opening missions with a missionary at the head was properly fulfilled. Different branches of the Movement are thus working in various parts of the world.

The Holy Quran is being translated into various languages. Besides English and German, it was also translated into Dutch. In the Latin American

countries, demand was increasing and so a translation and commentary of the Holy Quran in Spanish was published in 1986. It gives us great pleasure to bring to the notice of Muslim brothers and sisters that translations in French, Japanese, Chinese and Russian are under way.

General Remarks

The members of the Ahmadiyya Movement have pledged themselves to the service of Islam. One of the clauses of the *Bai'at* (Pledge) is:

I will hold religion above the world.

Let us re-dedicate ourselves for the service of Islam again today. Holding of "Islam above the world" is a very heavy burden we have taken upon ourselves. Let us search our hearts whether we are prepared to take up this burden, and are we preparing ourselves for the onerous duties, and are we marching towards the goal set before us. Are our lives being shaped on Quranic lines, and are we really following the Holy Prophet. For those who pay scant attention to their Pledge, the Holy Quran administers a stern warning, as below:

"O you who believe, why say you that which you do not. It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you say that which you do not."
(61:2,3).

You can take Islam to the doorsteps of others when you are Muslims yourselves. Do not be afraid of any opposition. Let others say whatever they wish. Beware lest Allah say: You have drifted away from Islam!

Worldly life and its pleasures are shortlived. No one knows when the bugle is blown and bag and baggage rolled up. Let us take the message of the Quran to the four corners of the world before it is too late. How aptly Hazrat Mirza sahib says:

"O careless one, beware and gird up your loins to serve the Quran, before you hear that someone has departed."