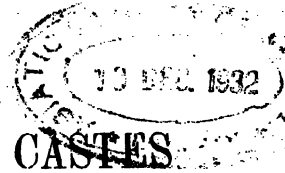


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THE
MYSORE TRIBES AND CASTES
VOLUME IV

BY

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MAHDAVIA MUSALMANS.

ORIGIN AND TRADITION OF THE COMMUNITY—RELIGIOUS TENETS—THE CAUSES OF THEIR TRANSMIGRATION AND HABITAT IN MYSORE—SOCIAL ORGANISATION—OCCUPATION.

ORIGIN AND
TRADITION
OF THE
COMMUNITY.

THE origin of the Mahdavia Community * dates from the beginning of the tenth century Hijira.

The people belonging to this community are the followers of Syed Muhammad, who took the title of 'Mahdi—Mauwood' (the predicted Mahdi). The Prophet, Muhammad, had predicted, "my followers would not be a prey to apostasy, in as much as I am at first, there would be a Mahdi from my lineage in the middle and lastly there would appear Messiah."

Among Muhammadans there are three schools of thought regarding the question of the appearance of Mahdi in this world. The disciples of one school say that there is no need of Mahdi in as much as the teachings of the holy Koran and the Prophet, Muhammad, have reached the stage of perfection for mankind. The other school says that when the world would be nearing the end, in Mecca or Medina there would appear a great Redeemer or Reformer by the title of 'Mahdi', who with the co-operation of Messiah, would kill Dajjal, the great adversary of Messiah, (Christ) and thus he would wipe off the sinners from the world and that he would also be the ruler of the world.

The third sect has agreed that, according to the genuine traditions (Hadith-i-Sahihah) and the true interpretations of the verses of Koran touching this

* I am indebted to Mr. Pir Saheb Miyan of the Mysore Educational Service for the account of this community.

question, the predicted Mahdi may appear in any place and at any time, when virtue subsides and vice prevails. Thus the Mahdavia community believes that the predicted Mahdi did appear in Jaunpur in the Northern part of India, who had the exact bearings as predicted by the Prophet Muhammad. For instance, he descended from Ali, the son-in-law and Fātima, the lovely daughter of the Prophet. His name, in accordance with the predictions, was (Syed) Muhammad. His father's name was (Syed) Abdulla and that of his mother was Amina. He was born in 847 A.H. corresponding with 1448 A.D. at Jaunpur, an old historical city in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, during the reign of Sultan Mahmood, son of Sultan Ibrahim Sharkhi of the Sharkhi Dynasty of Jaunpur. While he was still a boy, his parents passed away. However, he was educated at Jaunpur which was crowded with philosophers and was well-known for Islamic culture at that period. It was called the "Shiraz of India". At his early age, he took the title of Asadul-Ulema (a lion among the philosophers). Before and after his birth, the people noticed great many miracles by which they expected that he would be a great saint. Accordingly, he devoted himself to God. By and by he gained a worldwide fame for his pioussness and devotion. The people gathered round him and called him 'Syed-ul-Aulia' (leader of the saints). Even the king, Husain, son of Sultan Mahmood Sharkhi of Jaunpur, who had then ascended to the throne of Jaunpur, became a staunch adherent.

He preached after the tenets of Islam and gained thousands of disciples. The basic doctrine he preached was to renounce the world in order to realise God. In renouncing the world, he did not prohibit from enjoyment of family life, but by renunciation he meant the renunciation of the love of worldly things

and lust that keep man away from devoting himself to God. He also preached that the ultimate aim of man is to see God in this world, even to go beyond this, *i.e.*, to become one with the Universal Being. He preached in accordance with the principles of Islam and generally dealt with constant meditation of God, renunciation of the transitory world, complete trust in God, and company of the great-souled ones, etc.

At the age of forty, he declared and claimed himself to be the predicted Mahdi and that it was binding upon the people to believe in and follow him. With the purpose of propagating his religion and performing 'Haj', he left Jaunpur with the household members and a few disciples. He travelled through the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Central Provinces, Gujerat and the Deccan. He went as far as Gulberga in the Deccan. Then he proceeded to Mecca *via* Aden. After performing 'Haj', he again returned to India and stayed in Gujerat for some years whence he proceeded towards Persia *via* Chaman and Khandahar. He travelled through Khurasan and reached Ferrah in the Province of Herat (Afghanistan) where he died in the year 910 A.H. corresponding with 1505 or 1506 A.D. He won thousands of followers wherever he visited. Even the Kings, Sultan Mahmood Begra of Gujerat, Sultan Giasuddin of Mandhu, Ahmad Nizam Shah and Burhan Nizamul Mulk of Ahmadnagar, Zubdatul Mulk Usman Khan of Jhalur, Sultan Hussain Mirza of Khurasan and thousands of Nawabs, Subadars, high officers and learned men of the time embraced his religion.

The followers of Syed Muhammad Mahdi Mavood of Jaunpur perform and follow the main rules of the Shariat of Islam that are obligatory on every Musalman. They also believe that the Dogmas set up by the four Imams (scholars), namely (1)

Maliki, (2) Hambali, (3) Shafai and (4) Hanafi, being the interpretations of the verses of Holy Koran and Hadith, are true in their sense but they hold that they are not bound to stick up to any particular creed. On the other hand, they adopt those rules that are found to bear the eminence and the truest sense of the teachings of Koran and Hadith as preached and adopted by their Imam 'Mehdi.'

On the 27th of Ramzan, every man, woman, young and old, after making their dwelling houses, their bodies and their clothes clean, read the holy Koran, offer prayer, suspend their business throughout the day and profusely distribute alms among the poor. At the ensuing mid-night (27th night of Ramzan) which is observed as the most auspicious one, all of them gather in groups in the Mosques and offer prayer, called the '*Dugana-i-Lailatul Qadr*,' which is observed to be obligatory on them as enacted by the Imam Mahdi.

They do not join with other Musalmans in offering the usual prayer when it is conducted by a non-Mahdavi. They offer it in company with a Mahdavi conductor or singly in his absence in the way taught and adopted by the Prophet Muhammad. They do not observe Muharram in the sense and method by which some of the ignorant Muhammadans do. They do not keep Tazias and Taboots and carry them in procession with wild demonstrations, but on the other hand, the 7th, 9th and the 10th of the month of Muharram are observed as the days of great events in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and his followers and adherents. From the first to the tenth of this month, they hold meetings in which the lives of Imam Husain and his followers (the martyrs of Karbala), their efforts to defend truth

RELIGIOUS
TENETS.

and the circumstances which led to their martyrdom are explained, and Fātheha ceremonies are done. On the tenth, they embrace and request each other to forget and forgive the wrong done to each other in the past, after the example of the most revered martyr, Imam Husain, when he left home to fight with the forces of Yazīd. This they deem as a token of the remembrance of the eventful day of Imam Husain's martyrdom. Thus the differences are erased from the minds of each other: mutual and friendly relations are again established.

In the month of Rajab at morning time on every Thursday, they go to the graveyards, shower flowers on graves and perform Fātheha. They read some verses from the Holy Koran and pray to God for the salvation of the dead. In the evening, some special food is prepared and the poor are fed.

On the 12th of the month of Rabi-ul-Aval and the 18th of Ziqada, they observe as the auspicious birthday of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imam Mahdi Mavood which they commemorate and celebrate their holy birthdays by feeding the poor and holding meetings wherein their lives and teachings are expounded by the Moulvis.

**THE CAUSES
OF THEIR
TRANS-
MIGRATION
AND HABITAT
IN MYSORE.**

Mostly in Sind, Gujarat and Deccan, hundreds of thousands of people embraced this religion (Mahd-avism). In the earlier part of the tenth century, Hejara Mahdavism widely spread throughout Deccan. Even Burhan Nizam Shah, 913-961 A.H. corresponding to 1508-1553 A.D., the third king of the Nizam Shahi dynasty of Ahamednagar, embraced this religion and also gave his daughter in marriage to one of the grandsons of the founder of Mahdavism. Almost all the Durbars of the Muhammadan Kings of Deccan had been crowded with them and their armies consisted of thousands of Mahdavis. Muhammad

Khasim Farishtha, the well known and reliable historian of Ahamednagar and Bijapur Durbars, says that during the latter part of the 10th century A.H. owing to the efforts and encouragement of one Jamal Khan Mahdavi, the Dictator of Ahmednagar in the reign of Ismail Nizam Shah, Mahdavis were attracted from every part of the country towards Ahamednagar. However, three important causes lead to their migration from one place to another. Firstly, the zeal and enthusiasm of the upholders of this religion, mostly the spiritual leaders of this community considered it their duty, incumbent upon themselves to promulgate their religious doctrines. Hence they travelled taking the torch of this religion from one part of the country to another with their families and some of their adherents; thus in every town or province they visited, they gained thousands of followers.

Secondly, the growth, progress, and domination of this creed caused some jealousy in the minds of the bigotted Muhammadans. The bigotted Moulvis of the time began to poison the minds and feelings of the rulers and powerful men by saying that this religion was quite contrary to Islam and also by saying that Mahdi would conquer all the kingdoms and also by speaking very low of the religion itself. To add to these, the Tasbeeh* daily uttered by the Mahdvis after the Isha prayer was also intolerable to them. Hence they began to illtreat the Mahdavis.

* Usually the Mahdavi Mussalmans after the Isha prayer utter some words loudly as a token of their confession, in which they confess that they believe in the unity and existence of the Almighty God, Prophecy of Muhammad, the Holy Koran and the teachings of Mahdi (the predicted Mahdi of Jaunpur). The Tasbeeh runs as follows:—

Lailaha Illallah Mohammed Rasoolallah
 Alaho Illahona Mohammed Nabiunna
 At Koran Val Mahdi Imamanna Amonha Suddakhanna

(There is no God, but God Muhammad is our Prophet and the Koran and Mahdi are our Imams (Leaders).)

On certain occasions they were forcibly expelled by the bigotted rulers who also caused bloodshed. Thus the Mahdavis sought some safe quarters for their existence and undisturbed promulgation of their religion.

The third and the most important cause of their migration is the search for the military profession in different kingdoms. A minute study of the history shows that at the beginning of the 11th century A.H. they began to penetrate into the more southern parts of Deccan, *i.e.*, Adoni, Cuddapah, Arcot, Trichinopoly, Chitaldrug, Bednore, Devanhally, Sira (in Tumkur District), Seringapatam, etc., which were at that time the capital towns of different Rajas or Nawabs or the dominions of the neighbouring kingdoms. The latter five towns are now included in the territory of Mysore which bear some historical importance in the ancient history of Mysore. Here they joined military service under the various petty Rajas and Nawabs. Thousands of Mahdavis had taken up military profession under the various sovereigns of the kingdom of Mysore. During the reigns of Dodda Krishna Raj (1716-1733), Chamraj (1733-1736) and Chick Krishna Raj (1736-66), many Mahdavis have rendered military services.

**SOCIAL
ORGANI-
SATION.**

Generally the Mahdavi Mussalmans are grouped into two main classes. To one belong the priests or Gurus who select for themselves their families and for their immediate followers and disciples, a suitable locality to live and it is surrounded by a boundary. Such area is termed a "Daira". Daira is an Arabic word which means a circle; hence the Mahdavi Mussalmans are generally called the 'Daira Walas' denoting the people living in 'Daira'. These priests or Gurus and their immediate disciples are not

permitted by their religious doctrines to do any worldly transaction to earn their livelihood nor to hold jagirs or accept fixed allowance. They do not make even any kind of cultivation within their Dairas. Here they lead an undisturbed life spending every minute in their devotion of God. If anything is offered to a priest by any person in the name of God, he would distribute it equally among his disciples saving nothing for the future. These priests are the spiritual leaders as well as the social reformers. They devoted themselves for the realisation of God for the up keep and safeguarding of the religion, for the spiritual and social guidance and advancement of other people. In most cases, the family disputes are referred to these priests who are thought to be the sane judges. They are called Tarik-ud-Dunia (those who have renounced the world) otherwise known as 'Pirs' or 'Murshids'.

The other class consists of the people who are allowed to do the worldly transactions and earn their livelihood. They are called the 'Kasibs', *i.e.*, those who take to some profession. In spite of their worldliness, they are bound to make steady progress in spirituality. For this purpose, they select for themselves some priest or other, who after due initiation, teaches them the preliminary teachings, and when they attain a higher degree, they are taught the more sacred things for developing spirituality and realising God which they attain from uninterrupted succession from one priest to another. When these Kasibs reach the stage where they aspire spiritual prosperity, they give up all the worldly enjoyments. They go to some priests and solemnly take a vow to the effect that they would not further enter into any kind of secular transactions for the sake of wholly devoting themselves to God, whence they would begin to lead a purely spiritual life.

If a person belonging to any one of the two above mentioned classes is found to commit any nefarious act inconsistent with the religious doctrines, an assembly of the priestly people and learned men are called to examine him and declare a punishment pro-rata. This kind of assembly is called Ijma. If one confesses his own guilt in the presence of Ijma and submits himself to undergo the punishment ordained in accordance with the religious doctrines, he is treated in the society as before, otherwise he is excommunicated, and all kinds of relations are cut off with him and even he is driven out of Daira.

The Mahdavis do not intermarry with other non-Mahdavi Mussalmans, although it is not prohibited by their religious doctrines. They generally bring daughters from non-Mahdavi Mussalmans and convert them to Mahdavis. But they are very particular in not giving their own daughters in marriage to non-Mahdavi Mussalmans.

Begging is strictly forbidden. They do not go on begging for alms as some of the professional Fakirs do. They leave everything entirely to God, even their own maintenance.

The laymen distribute one tenth share out of their incomes among the priests or the deserving poor, and it is called 'Usher' which means one-tenth share. It is just like paying Zakkat (1—40th share out of the annual income) enacted by the Islamic principles as binding upon every Mussalman who possesses at least 100 rupees in cash or jewels worth so much.

The religious ties among them are so great and hard that they even do not bury the dead bodies in the graveyard of the non-Mahdavis. But whatever the country it may be, and however great the distance may be, they bring the dead body to their own place, and bury it in their own graveyard.

In the event of any inconveniences regarding conveyance, they bury the body there alone and by reciting some prayers, they confide it to the care of God thereby putting a lien on the earth. Afterwards they bring the body to their own graveyard and bury it there. The number of months for which the body is confided is denoted by the number of small stones placed near the body inside the grave. Usually the period of confiding does not exceed eleven months. If the confided body is not removed after the expiry of the period, the usual process of decomposition begins. So, care is taken to see it removed before the expiry of the period. Excepting those above mentioned, and a few customs and ceremonies, they do not differ from those current among other Muslims.

A few years before the fall of Seringapatam, all the Mahdavis were expelled out of the territory of Tippoo Sultan on account of the religious quarrels. As it was a custom, the bigotted Mullah excited the Sultan against them : hence all the Mahdavis quitted the territory of Mysore, their properties being forfeited.

After the fall of Seringapatam, the most important and historic city in the year 1799, the benign British Government issued a proclamation assuring peace and inviting all the Mahdavis to the territory of Mysore to resettle there, and they then settled in different places after their exile. Some actually responded to the kind call, went and settled there reoccupying their lost positions in the Government.

The Mahdavis, as they are lovers of peace generally took to cultivation. Thus trade and cultivation form their main occupation. Most of them are prospering tradesmen commanding large business. In some places, specially like Channapatna, a most

OCCUPATION.

important commercial place in Mysore State, they have specialised in the manufacturing of wooden toys with beautiful and gorgeous colours, which have become the chief industry of the place.
