OXFORD

Oxford in India Readings

THEMES IN INDIAN HISTORY

INDIA'S

ISLAMIC

TRADITIONS,

711-1750

edited by Richard M. Eaton

The Sociology of Political Engagement:

The Mahdawiyah and the State[*]

Derryl N. Mac Lean

In the course of the Muslim ninth century (fifteenth century AD), a number of millennial movements emerged throughout the Muslim world in anticipation of the tenth and the impending appearance of a *mahdi* ('rightly-guided one'), messiah-like figure who, it was widely believed, would herald the events of the end of the world at the close of the first millennium. Most of the movements were ephemeral, and we know of their existence primarily in refutations of the jurists. One, however, did exhibit considerable chronological durability and textual productivity. This movement was the Indian Mahdawiyah founded by Saiyid Muhammad Jaunpuri (847—910/1443—1505), a pious religious scholar and Chishti Sufi from Jaunpur in northern India who claimed to be the long-awaited Mahdi in 901/1495. The followers of the Indian Mahdi have survived down to the present, in varying conditions of prosperity, in Sind, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and the Deccan.

Little is known of Saiyid Muhammad's early life, although he clearly received a quality Chishti education at Jaunpur, the Muslim cultural centre of north India during the fifteenth century. He entered history proper on his arrival at Ahmedabad in Gujarat at the advanced age of fifty-three. Here he began to teach an activist Chishti message of absolute renunciation of the world and its representatives, and in the process attracted a number of disciples and controversy. Exiled from Ahmedabad for his views on the physical vision of God *(didar)*, and then from Patan for his *takfir* ('anathema') of those who desire the world, he settled at Barli, just outside Patan, where the mixed messages of his earlier years were clarified in a direct audition from God: 'You are the promised Mahdi: proclaim the manifestation of your Mahdiship, and do not fear the people' (Wali, 1947, p. 12). His public proclamation of the Mahdiship *(mahdiyat)* at Barli propelled him from those with acceptable, if radical, Sufi charisma into the more dangerous messianic realm of Mahdi charisma. His increasingly focused rejection of the political and religious status quo, coupled with mounting support among the elites, led to his expulsion from Gujarat. Saiyid Muhammad emigrated first to Sind and then, after his expulsion there, to Khurasan, where he settled at Farah (south western Afghanistan) and spent the last three years of his life, dying on Monday 19 Dhu a-Qa'dah 910 (23 April 1505).

In his teachings, the Mahdi laid particular stress on recreating in the last days the original primal community of the Prophet Muhammad as realized at Medina.[2] Just as Muhammad the Prophet was the seal of prophecy *(nubuwat)*, so Muhammad the Mahdi was the seal of sanctity *(wilayat)*. While the Prophet had explained in perfect form the Qur'anic laws relating to *iman*

('faith') and *islam* ('submission', i.e., actions), so the Mahdi had explained in similar perfect form the Qur'anic laws relating to *ihsan* ('spiritual perfection'). It was the eschatological authority of the Mahdi, engendered by his wilayat and equal in the last days to the prophetic authority of former times, that empowered the recreation of the original Medinan paradigm. This restoration necessitated the purification of historical Islam from innovations *(bida')* subsequent to the Prophet. Rejecting especially the post-prophetic notions of juristic imitation *(taqlid)* and Qur'anic abrogation *(naskh)*, the Mahdi was able to locate textual and conceptual space to refer for social and moral directives directly back to the Qur'an and the prophetic *hadith,* as re-read by the Mahdi (Badayuni, 1972, pp. 80). The Mahdawis then attempted to recreate at the end of time the original righteous community where they could concentrate their actualization of the imminent millennium. To do so, the Mahdi recovered the Qur'anic notion of *hijrah* ('emigration') as a religious duty *(fard)* defining the community of believers at the millennium. While emigration was from a cluster of existing physical and social ties, it was also immigration to new residential communes formed by the Mahdawis. Called *da'iras*, or 'circles', and modeled after Sufi hospices, they consisted of an enclosed compound governed through the consensus *(ijma)* of its members. Within these communes the Mahdawis practiced intensive breath meditation *(pas-i anfas)* and an extended but silent liturgy *(dhikr-i khafi)*, forbade its members from earning a living *(kasb)* or receiving a sinecure, and distributed all unsought income daily and equally *(sawiyat)* to the commune members. The purpose of these arrangements was to facilitate the removal of obstacles between man and God and, through the various disciplines, achieve the direct vision of God (didar) thought to be a sign of the true Muslims of the last days.

This essay intends to draw attention and criticism to important issues in the secondary literature concerning the Mahdawiyah as an Islamic millennial movement: its social location and its political profile. In the first instance, modern historians of Indian Islam generally assume that the Mahdawiyah was a mass movement of popular revolt on the part of the oppressed and disenfranchised, a movement that emerged from the smaller tradition of the villages and was engendered by the chaotic conditions of the period. Thus, Mohammad Yasin characterizes the movement as 'a plebian revolt of the simple-hearted' (1974, p. 124), and K.A. Nizami refers to it as 'a crisis and a commotion in the lower strata of society' (1989, p. 51). In the second instance, the political corollary of locating the Mahdawiyah among the distressed masses is to conclude that the relationship between the movement and the state was volatile A.S.B. Ansari, for example, compares the Mahdawi 'cult of the dagger' to the Isma'ili Assassins, relates it to their feelings of oppression, and suggests that the state authorities 'were perfectly justified' in their attempts to put down the movement by force (1963, pp. 64, 68). That is, the assumption is that the Mahdawiyah, due to its social colouring and Mahdi typology, occurred on the level of religio-political revolt against the state and elicited and equally vigorous state policy of containment.

There are several conceptual and methodological problems in this line of analysis. One can observe the unfortunate tendency to combine earlier and later Mahdawi sources, as well as those from different regions, in order to form a composite picture of something reified as the Mahdawiyah. The undeniable presence of a considerable body of later Mahdawi literature in

the vernaculars, especially in the eighteenth century, cannot be introduced as evidence for a populist, mass-based movement in its sixteenth-century origins. Nor can the Mahdi's pronouncements be used as evidence for much later developments within the movement. The Mahdawis engaged in a constant re-reading of the Mahdi's texts, a process leading them into diverse positions depending on the changing context.

Further, a series of comparative and qualitative arguments from religion are introduced into the reading. General and theoretical observations about the nature of Mahdi-type movements are taken as given from classical Arabic texts, combined with a sociology from prior or subsequent Mahdi movements such as the Sudanese Mahdiyah, and then applied to the reading of the Indian Mahdawiyah on the grounds that it was after all a Mahdi movement. Moreover, there is a tendency to assume that the Mahdawiyah tenets, apart from those deemed orthodox, are demonstrably irrational and explicable due to the social location among the simple minded villager. 'It is peculiar to Muslim masses,' observes Ansari, 'that the credulous among them are always ready to gather around such pretenders and lend them support' (1963, p. 43). The problem is compounded by the location of the modern discussion within the genre of 'disputation' *(munazarat)*, where the analysis tends to be replaced by either refutation or affirmation, depending on religious convictions. What is perceived as irrational is simply that which is not part of a pan-Islamic tradition as reformulated during the course of the nineteenth century. Like many of the reified modern arguments concerning pre-modern Muslim India, it is unlikely to prove convincing to those who do not share the perspective.

In what follows, I intend to reattach the Mahdawiyah to its historical contexts and suggest that changing social circumstances had an impact on the relationship between the movement and the state. In short, I see two general chronological phases in the pre-modern social and political history of the movement: the first, the activist phase, extended from the death of the Mahdi through the first five Mahdawi *khulafa* ('successors') and their followers until toward the end of the sixteenth century, while the second, the quietist phase, was roughly coeval with Mughal suzerainty in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The analysis will first confront the social location and political profile of the early Mahdawiyah, for which the evidence is more complete, before drawing a series of contrasts between the two phases.

A preliminary prosopographical analysis of the onomastic data of first generation Mahdawi converts permits a profile of their geographical, social, and occupational location. As far as status hierarchy related to lineage claims is concerned, the vast majority of the Mahdawis for whom titles of descent are known, claimed elevated *ashraf* status (82 per cent), especially *saiyid* and *siddiqi*. The status is avowed equally by those with a pre-Mahdawi religious or secular vocation. Moreover, of those converts with a discernable occupation, the largest group comprised those holding positions at the court or in the military (52 per cent), the two being intertwined during this period, followed by Sufis (29 per cent) and *madrasa*-educated Brahman gardener, Hajji Mali, is given a service occupation ('Abd al-Rahman, 1948, pp. 65—70). None are peasants.

This preliminary collation, imperfect though it is, strongly suggests that the first generation of converts tended to be recruited from those claiming ashraf descent, belonging to the

political and religious establishment, and holding positions of influence in urban areas such as Ahmedabad, Patan, Thatta and Bayanah.[3] This was not a middling elite of minor bureaucrats and insignificant scholars. In Sind alone, the Mahdawis managed to attract the conversion, among others, of the qazis of the two largest cities, the commander-in chief *(amir al-umara)* of the army, and the primary spiritual guide of the Sammah sultan.[4] Equally importantly, the converted tended to come from families with a tradition of membership in the elite. Qazi Qadan, for example, was a scion of a renowned family of Bhakkari saiyids and qazis and would eventually occupy his father's post as qazi of Bhakkar (Qani', 1886, v. 3, pp. 137—8), while the Nuri brothers were Faruqi descendants of Farid Ganj-i Shakkar and inherited the family's Chishti hospice in Ahmedabad (Sulayman, n.d., v. 3, pp. 138—77). The examples are not isolated and confirm that we are concerned with members of an entrenched elite, bearing the cultural resources and expectations of such an elite, and not with upwardly mobile recent Hindustani converts to Islam.

The case of Shah Ni'mat (a first generation convert and the third Mahdawi *khalifa*) is particularly instructive since he is at times extolled as a reformed highway robber who became a Mahdawi, with the Robin Hood-like implication that mass elements of social protest were attached to the movement. On closer examination, however, his family turns out to be Siddiqi ashraf, originally from Syria or Iraq, who had become viziers of the Gujarat sultans (Husain, 1961, pp. 218—31; Ruh Allah, 1952, pp. 81—118). Shah Ni'mat himself actually succeeded to his father's office at the royal court. He did, it is true, get into trouble with the sultan over certain financial irregularities connected with his official position and later became a renegade after slaying a favourite African slave of the king. His example, however, cannot be adduced as evidence of social banditry in the normally understood sense.

I must add a cautionary note, however. The above prosopography is preliminary and naturally subject to disconfirmation as the data base expands. There are also many well-known problems with this type of analysis. For one thing, the numbers of converts about whom we cannot extract any information beyond the name is rather high (29 per cent), and this raises problems of how representative the profile is of the membership at large. Indeed, it seems likely that the analysis is primarily of the Mahdawi leadership or those important to subsequent lineages, for whom more fulsome biographical data is preserved, and it is possible that the leadership came from a different class than the majority of the followers. Moreover, the location of class and status must rely on the later *tadhkirat* literature, which may well exaggerate the pre-conversion status of those founding lineages of pirs of subsequent importance, although in some cases we can confirm the social location through non-Mahdawi sources.

Still, the prosopographical suggestion of the movement's social colouring is supported by lists of convert communities given in indictments of the Mahdawis. Thus, the 'ulama of Gujarat represented to Sultan Mahmud the danger posed to the state by the Mahdawi conversions of religious scholars ('ulama), nobles *(umara)*, viziers, noble women *(khawatin)*, gentry *(muluk)*, soldiers *(lashkariyan)* and Sufis (Burhan al-Din, 1959, pp. 117, 183). In Surid north India, the 'ulama's concern was with the Mahdawi recruitment of landlords *(dihqanan)*, merchants *(ujjar)*, and high-ranking state officials *(hukkam)*, primarily Afghan commanders (Ni'mat Allah. 1960—

2, v. 1, p. 380). The groups noted in the indictments are the same as those located by the prosopography and confirm that we are concerned with an entrenched political and religious elite and not with a peasant movement. If it had been a revolt of the proletariat or the peasantry, surely the indictments would have dwelt on what would have been a most unsavoury connection.

Finally, the idiom of expression of the earliest Mahdawi sources is that of the highly educated Indo-Muslim elite. The initial literature is written either in Arabic or a cultured court Persian with a high percentage of passages in untranslated Arabic[5]. Indeed, code-switching between Arabic and Persian is a characteristic of the early Mahdawi literature. The Arabic is not translated into Persian, nor is the Persian translated into any indigenous language. The assumption of the texts is that the audience will be highly literate in both Persian and Arabic, the languages of pan-Islamic and pan-Indian discourse.

These early Mahdawi works can be located in the high tradition of Muslim discourse that evolved in India. The themes discussed in the literature, the authorities invoked in defence of the themes, and the technical vocabulary utilized to discuss them are all familiar from other Indo-Muslim works. If anything there is a heightened concern with alphabetic and linguistic dexterity and complexity. The *kalam* ('discourses') of Miyan Ilahdad Hamid, a first generation convert, is constructed solely from undotted letters, anticipating the much later undotted *tafsir* of Faydi[6]. Miyan Malik Mihri, another first generation convert, plays similar games at the end of time, registering almost every known device of Persian prosody. In one series of *ghazals*, he alternates dotted and undotted letters, then dotted and undotted words, ending in a flourish with dotted and undotted ghazals (1892, v.1, pp. 36—7).

It is clear that the quality of Mahdawi discourse was considered a crucial proof of the truth of their position. To a certain extent, early Mahdawi literature appears as a kind of Islamist discourse over the authority to interpret. Thus, one finds, for instance, a series of arguments or incidents that reduce to the superior grammar or knowledge of Mahdawi foundational texts. A fine example of this is given by the historian Badayuni in his lengthy report of the disputations of Shaikh 'Ala'i Mahdawi (d. 957/1550) at the court of Islam Shah Sur. In front of the king and the assembled nobles and scholars, the Mahdawi sharply criticized the Arabic pronunciation and grammar of a certain Mulla Jalal Bhim, focusing especially on the mulla's misreading of the hadith description of the Mahdi, *ajall al-jabhah* ('broadest of brow'), as if derived from *jalal* (the mulla's own name) and not the more proper *jalal*. 'By God', Shaikh 'Ala'i told the mulla, 'you represent yourself among the commonality as the most learned of the 'ulama, yet you cannot express yourself properly. You know nothing of the subtleties, allusions, and particulars of the sciences of hadith (Badayuni, 1865—69, v.1, pp. 401—2). The poor mulla, we are told, 'became ashamed and said not another word'. The incident is not isolated. Non-Mahdawi sources make it clear that the intellectual challenge of the Mahdawiyah was based on standard texts and interpretive conventions, and moreover, was formidable[7]. This is, of course to be expected from their social location.

It is now possible to turn our attention to the complex relationship between the early Mahdawiyah and the state. The Mahdi himself always held a view that messianic sanctity

(Wilayat) must be manifested in concrete ways, but he was unclear about what this meant in terms of the state. His personal views concerning the political implications of his Mahdiship seem to have evolved from an initial activism to a quietist stance, the dividing line being the expulsion from Sind. Those who perceive his wilayat as unitary are thus able to locate pronouncements of the Mahdi that support either an activist or a quietist position *vis-à-vis* the non-Mahdawi Muslim state.

On the one hand, the emphasis placed by the Mahdi on the singularity of the Mahdawi righteous community, along with the constant takfir (charging with infidelity) of opponents, could be interpreted as legitimizing compelling action against non-Mahdawi Muslims. In the Mahdi's first public pronouncement, an open letter addressed to the sultan of Gujarat he laid down his agenda in uncompromising terms with clear political implications:

I say by the command God Almighty that I am the promised Mahdi of the end of time… It is obligatory *(lazim)* on everyone—sultans, nobles *(umara)* officers *(khawanin)*, viziers, the wealthy, the faqirs, 'ulama, the pious and all people—to investigate, verify the truth, and accept it. If you allege that I impute slander and lies to God and disavow me, then it is incumbent on you to prove my lie and execute me. If you do not [and you are right], everywhere I go I will proclaim my mission to the people and lead them astray, inflicting harm on them. It is incumbent on the authorities of the time *(hakiman-i zaman)* to select one of the two options [convert or execute]. If they do not, their faces will be blackened in both the worlds[8].

Moreover, the Mahdi referred many times to those who denied his Mahdiship as non-Muslim *(kafir)*, and once even told Shaikh Sadr al-Din, the chief qazi of Thatta, 'If God Almighty gave me the power, I would levy the jizya [poll-tax on non-Muslims] on them, 'raising his sword in the air and adding, 'for them only this remains' (Wali, 1947, p. 25). Since the reference in the tradition is specifically to mullas this seems to charge the Muslim religious elite with being non-Muslim, and implies the possibility of a jihad against those who were formally Muslim. The Mahdi's use of the inflammatory term *harb* (someone from *dar al-harb*, 'the abode of war') in this incident would support the interpretations[9].

On the other hand, the emphasis placed by the Mahdi on the inner life of his followers could be used in support of a quietist stance. The vast majority of the Mahdi traditions relate directly to personal conduct and intensified group ritual, primarily on a radical Chishti pattern. Only one of the twenty chapters of the first major compilation of the Mahdi's sayings, the *Insaf-nama* of Miyan Wali, concerns jihad (1947, pp. 205—10). The remainder focus on such matters as the renunciation of the world *(tark-i dunya)*, the obligations of continual *dhikr*, the vision of God (didar), and the organization of the institution of hijrah to the da'ira. Indeed, by elevating hijrah over jihad as the crucial duty of true believers at the millennium the Mahdi could even be seen as advocating an ethic of retreat, not expansion. Although hijrah, of course, textually bears the implication of subsequent jihad, the Mahdi himself did not consistently draw this connection.

In short, the reported sayings of the Mahdi, like the hadith of the Prophet, are ambiguous and opaque, occasionally contradictory, and always capable of interpretation by subsequent generations. It is not surprising, then, that not long after the death of the Mahdi, his followers would disagree sharply over the stance the nascent community should adopt toward non-Mahdawis and the state. The argument and its resolution in martyrdom are usually subsumed in Mahdawi sources under the rubric *qutalu wa qutilu* ('they fought and were slain')[10]. The discussion revolves around a *tafsir* ('commentary') given by the Mahdi on Qur'an 3:195: 'For those who emigrated *(hajru)* and were driven out of their homes and were damaged for My cause and fought and were slain *(qutalu wa qutilu)*, I shall forgive their sins and admit them to gardens watered by running streams as a reward from God.'

In his tafsir, the Mahdi began by adopting a mystical exegesis of the verse: defining 'those who emigrated' as those who reoriented their natures to the domain of higher truth *(alam al-haqiqat)*, receiving the manifestation of the quality of Lordship in proximity to God; and 'those who fought and were slain' as those who struggled with the sensual self *(nafs)* and slew it with the sword of sincerity *(sidq)*, Expanding on the theme, however, the Mahdi ruled that while the greater, mystical jihad was with sensuality, sanction had been given by God to flight *(qatalu)* in the case of oppression *(zulm)*, citing the important Mahdawi proof text, Qur'an an 22:39—40, in support of such action.

Not long after the death of the Mahdi, Saiyid Khundmir, the second Mahdawi Khalifah, argued that the time of oppression foretold in the Qur'an and by the Mahdi had now arrived. This was due to the actions of Sultan Muzaffar II (917—32/1511—26) of Gujarat who, alarmed by the expansion of the movement, had received and begun to act on a fatwa of execution *(qatl)* of the Mahdawis, burning da'iras, killing some members, and exiling or branding others with an iron claw. Not surprisingly, Khundmir read these developments in the light of the proof texts and decided on action: 'it has now become a general religious obligation *(fard-i 'ayn)* for all—men and women, slaves and freepersons—to defeat the oppressors *(zaliman)* so that the faithful *(mu'minan)* will be victorious' (Wali. 1947, p. 206). The battle lines have been clearly drawn: on the one side are the followers of the Mahdi, the faithful (mu'minan), while on the other are the Muslim religious and state authorities, the oppressors *(zaliman)*. The hijrah of the faithful now leads to jihad against the oppressors, as expected by the Medinan paradigm.

A number of the senior members of the community, however, had reservations about Khundmir's interpretation, arguing that calling Muslims non-Muslim and fighting them would require the abrogation *(naskh)* of the Qur'an and the Shari'a and 'this is unlawful since the Mahdi was the clarifier of the Qur'an and not its abrogator, and the follower of the law of Muhammad and not its abrogator' (Wali, 1947, p. 207). Moreover, they continued, if this interpretation were to be accepted without limits, then it would follow that it would be lawful *(halal)* to appropriate the wives and daughters of such non-Mahdawi Muslims without benefit of marriage and confiscate their property, and this clearly would be scandalous and illegal.

Saiyid Khundmir responded quickly to this internal criticism, raising the level of rhetoric and confrontation, and eventually winning over the majority of Gujarati Mahdawis, although significant opposition remained. The examples of the foundational martyrs, 'Ali, Hasan, and

Husain, were adduced: just as it was in the first generation after Muhammad the Prophet so it would be now in the first generation after Muhammad the Mahdi. Khundmir then declared the era of the law of fighting *(hukm-i qatalu)*, dispatched Mahdawi brothers to assassinate the promulgators of the fatwa, and began to prepare for a messianic Battle of Badr *(jang-i badr-i wilayat)* equivalent in the last days to the original prophetic Battle of Badr (Husain, 1961, p. 97). An armed conflict inevitably ensued and, after an initial victory, the Mahdawis were routed in 930/1523 and a large number martyred, including Khundmir himself. As a vivid reminder of the danger of messianic revolt, the body of Khundmir was beheaded, skinned, stuffed with straw, and paraded through Gujarat. His head, skin, and torso were then buried in three different places.

The activist view of Saiyid Khundmir would persist after his martyrdom throughout most of India, as Mahdawis attempted to locate an arena for political victory *(ghalaba-yi surat)*: in Gujarat with the Puladi Afghans and Ulachis; in Sind with the Arghuns; in Rajasthan with the Jalori Afghans; and in the Deccan with the Barid Shahis and especially the Nizam Shahis[11]. It was, however, in the communes of Bayanah, and important administrative and trade centre on the route from Gujarat to Agra, that the activist expression of the Mahdawiyah reached its apex during the reign of Islam Shah Sur (952—61/1545—54). These communes, composed primarily of Afghans, were extremely forthright in their approach to the religious and political establishment. Shaikh 'Abd Allah Niyazi, who founded the first Mahdawi *da'ira* in the region and on whose cell Akbar would later construct his *'ibadat-khana*, is said to have been the spiritual guide (pir) of the Niyazi Afghan faction during their revolt, touring the hill country with a band of three or four hundred fully armed men preparing a revolt (Badayuni, 1865—69, v.1, p. 403). Shaikh 'Ala'i his even more militant disciple, is reported by Ni'mat Allah (1960—2, v.1, p. 380) to have surrounded himself with men 'always carrying with them swords, shields, and other instruments of war.' When eventually summoned to the king's court to account for his beliefs and actions, Shaikh 'Ala'i appeared with his companions provocatively armed and armoured, giving weight to the argument of the Shaikh al-Islam that the Mahdawis were guilty of rebellion *(khuruj)* since their creed *(da'wah)* holds that the Mahdi would be the king *(padshah)* of the world (Badayuni, 1865—9, v.1, pp. 399—400). The Bayanah incident culminated in the scourging of Shaikh 'Abd Allah and the execution of Shaikh 'Ala'i. The corpse of the latter would be torn apart by state elephants in a public spectacle, suggesting the seriousness with which the state authorities viewed the implications of a politically embedded Mahdawiyah.

In the long run, however, it was the quietist approach to living in the world that would prevail among Indian Mahdawis. The key turning-point appears to be the Mughal invasion of Gujarat in 980/1572, the cultic heart of the movement, the loss of a political base there with the defeat of the Puladis and the taming of the Jaloris, and the failure of the attempt by Shaikh Mustafa Gujarati to convince Akbar of a Mahdawi legitimization for the Mughals (MacLean, forthcoming). The last recorded attempt to locate a political arena was that of the Mahdawi commander, Jamal Khan, who raised Isma'il Nizam Shah (997—9/1588—90) to the throne of Ahmadnagar and established an aggressive but short-lived Mahdawi state (Firishtah, 1864—5, vol.2, pp. 150—2). Thereafter, the Mahdawis would relinquish the notion of either constituting

or confronting the state. There is a sociology of this second phase as well, and in what follows I would like to draw a series of contrasts between the two phases and suggest some implications by way of conclusion.

While the initial leadership of the movement tended to be recruited from the political and religious establishment, later Mahdawis did not actively recruit new membership but were more concerned with the retention of present members. In this, they were largely successful. Where conversions did occur, and they were rare, they tended to originate not from the urban Muslim elite, but from artisanal castes *(ahl-i hirfat)*, such as weavers, cotton carders, and dyers, in the vicinity of Jalor (in south-western Rajasthan) and Palanpur (in northern Gujarat), regions dominated by an existing Mahdawi petty state ('Ali Muhammad Khan, 1930, p. 73). The Mahdawiyah did not originate among the masses and never did become a mass movement, although in the course of the second phase, it was relegated to districts along the imperial frontier where it would evolve its understanding of the millennium.

While the early Mahdawis were preoccupied with urgent apocalyptic expectations, believing that the chain of end events had been set in motion and anticipating the imminent appearance of 'Isa (Jesus), later Mahdawis responded to the inevitable cognitive dissonance caused by the failure of these events by creating a theology of the delay of the apocalypse. They argued, for instance, that the hadith placing the Mahdi and 'Isa in the same eschatological time frame was a Shi'ite forgery (Qasim, 1974, pp. 5—6), and perceived the Mahdi as ushering in the era of the last millennium and not the immediate apocalyptic events, which are transferred to 'Isa (Fazl Allah, n.d., p. 561). By doing so, the Mahdawis were able to shift their millennial expectations from the present to the future. The world would be filled with justice, as expected of the Mahdi by hadith, but through divine intervention in the future and not by the collective political action of Mahdawis in the present. Until then, the just earth *('ard)* referred to by the hadith is that of the Mahdawi da'ira, echoing with continual *dhikr*.

At the same time, the later Mahdawis proposed a compromise in the social realization of the millennium, dividing the members of the movement into two discrete groups: the *ahl-i tark* ('renouncers')[12]. Strict observance of the totalizing Mahdawi rituals and schedules would eventually be limited to the renouncers, based in the da'ira and led by lineages of gate-keepers, the *pirzadagan*, descended from first generation Mahdawis, especially the Mahdi and Saiyid Khundmir. The providers, on the other hand received a special dispensation *(rukhsat)* to remain in the mundane world procuring a living and financing the renouncers of the da'ira through tithe *('ushr)* and interest-free loans. The Mahdi's charisma was routinized not into a political dynasty but into lineages of spiritual guides who were attentive to providing for the needs and identity of the community, but realistic about the real world outside the da'ira. The intellectual energy of these second phase pirs would be directed to enforcing community compliance to the consensus of the da'ira, primarily through the production of creedal statements (Qasim, 1944; Shihab al-Din, 1963, pp. 98—104).

While the early Mahdawis, after a period of vacillation, generally adopted an uncompromisingly activist stance toward the establishment, the later Mahdawis tended to prefer a low profile and a quietist stance. The later community was able to practice withdrawal

from the world through the renouncers, and at the same time to permit the participation of lay Mahdawis in the Mughal or Deccan political systems. The unique beliefs and rituals of the movement were relegated either to the private sphere of the da'ira or to the public sphere of the Mahdawi-dominated district (Palanpur) or quarter (Chanchalgudah), where it was supported materially by the lay community. This process enabled the lay Mahdawis to pursue a secular career without any religious implications and, indirectly, to safeguard the autonomy and identity of the larger community.

The early Mahdawiyah, then, was a protest movement directed against the religious and political establishment by members of that establishment. To a certain extent, the social colouring of the movement dictated the response of the establishment. The state 'ulama, who bore the brunt of the initial Mahdawi condemnation—'files buzzing around human excrement' Shaikh Mustafa called them (n.d., p. 48)—were naturally in favour of direct state action against the movement and promulgated a series of fatwas calling for their execution or banishment. Mahdawi and non-Mahdwai sources alike, however, portray the political establishment, the state, as being very reluctant to act on the authority of such fatwas, except where its constituent military and administrative elites were perceived as being in some way compromised by the movement. For Sultan Muzaffar II of Gujarat, the deciding factor for military action came when, according to Hajji al-Dabir (1979, 32), 'his creed spread and the amir and the army commanders believed in his talks.' For Islam Sur, it was the alarming conversion of major Afghan governors along with their troops—men like Bahwa Khan Lohani and A'zam Humayun Sarwani—in the context of a widespread Afghan revolt that resulted in the persecution of north Indian Mahdawis (Badayuni, 1865-9, v.1, pp. 402—8; Ni'mat Allah, 1960—2, v.1, pp. 383—5). As long as the Mahdawiyah was perceived as challenging the state through the active recruitment of an oppositional elite from within groups constituting the state, the Mahdawiyah appears to have been repressed. It was not the doctrine of the Mahdi by itself that led to the suppression of the movement, but the class location and political volatility of its supporters.

It is clear, however, that Deccani rulers and the Mughals were willing to tolerate a quietist Mahdawi presence where it did not exist in opposition to the state. During the second phase of Mahdawi development, with the Mahdawi political elite becoming minor political participants without religious colouring, the state was willing to adopt a policy of non-interference. The Afghan Mahdawi petty dynasty of Jalor, later Palanpur, is an example of this change in political profile. Initially supporting Saiyid Khundmir and opposing Akbar in his conquest of Gujarat, they would transfer their allegiance to the Mughals, marry into the royal family, and serve quietly as lower ranking *mansabdars* first of the Mughals, and then, when political fortunes shifted the Marathas and the British (Gulab Miyan, 1914). When the Mahdawi spiritual guide, Saiyid Ibrahim, provided advice to his patron Mujahid Khan (1048—74/1638—63) on how to govern Palanpur, his emphasis would not be on political representation of the Mahdawiyah to the outside world but on pious actions, especially the provision of the material conditions for local Mahdawi prosperity through financial grants to the pirs (Ibrahim, n.d.).

Although opposition to the Mahdawiyah remained, the state 'ulama, previously vehemently opposed to the movement, now tended to support a benign policy. The sea change

is best evidenced in the *Mubahathah-yi Alamgiri*, which records a discussion between the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, his chief qazi Abu Sa'id, and a delegation of Mahdawis at Ahmadnagar in 1095/1683. The qazi on being questioned by the emperor after the interrogation, referred to the movement as simply a legal school *(madhhab)*, not a sect or heresy, and adduced no legal provisions for subjecting its members to execution, imprisonment, or banishment.

Aurangzeb is said to have responded:

I am pleased to know this, for they are orthodox *(mutasharri')* in thought and deed. They conducted the interrogation with proofs from the Qur'an, the traditions, and the words of established religious scholars. They speak the *kalmia* ('creed') of our Prophet, are not opposed to religious law, act in agreement with the command of God and the Prophet, and follow the orthodox community *(ahl-i sunnat wa jama'at)*. They do say that the Mahdi has come and gone, but this phrase does not require any legal penalty. Give them permission *(rukhsat)* to depart. (Abu al-Qasim, n.d., 9)

What is of concern here is not the accuracy of this portrayal of Mahdawi beliefs and actions, but that the chief Mughal qazi and the emperor have followed the Mahdawi lead in de-emphasizing the movement's disengagements from the Muslim mainstream. In this benign reading, they are simply Sunni Muslims who believe that the Mahdi has come and gone. That the individuals articulating this genial view are Saiyid Abu Sa'id, a descendant of Saiyid Muhammad Tahir who had been assassinated by Mahdawis in 986/1587, and Aurangzeb, who is often thought to have adopted a sternly militant and uncompromising view of deviations from orthodoxy, simply underlines the success of the rapprochement. The emphasis has shifted from confrontation to compromise. The Mughal state clearly did not perceive its legitimacy threatened by a millennial movement whose theology had turned inward and whose lay members could be manipulated like any other.

When conflict does emerge during this second phase, it tends to originate not from the pan-Indian level but from a regional or district base, from local 'ulama and petty officials, elements operating on the cusp of the imperial system. Thus, when Saiyid Raju Shahid was martyred (1056/1646) during Aurangzeb's earlier governorate of Gujarat, it was through the overly aggressive actions of the *kotwal* (municipal officer) in the context of local Ahmadabad politics (Gulab, 1914, 170—4). As one might expect, this type of conflict tends to increase with the dissolution of effective Mughal authority and the growth to an exclusive Islamist platform in a situation of increased exterior or interior threats[13].

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the striking Mahdawi compromise with the state during the second phase. The evidence of the Mahdawiyah will not support the view that Mahdi-based movements, due to the textual expectations of a Mahdi, differ from other millennial movements in being essentially activist and militant, committed to establishing a perfect Islamic state on earth through a jihad. Like millennial movements elsewhere, the Mahdawiyah has a complex social and political history; it was not held captive of formative texts that prefigured social engagement. In some social contexts, as in the first phase, *hijrat* did

lead to jihad, political volatility, and a clash with the state. But in other contexts, as in the second phase, it did not, but formed the basis for the Mahdawi retreat inwards and political disengagement as a movement.

NOTES

1. The Mahdawis have never been enumerated separately in the census, and thus their numbers are open to speculation. Mahdawi estimates range from 150,000 to 300,000. See Tashrifillahi, 1990, pp. 243—532, for a gazetteer of the movement.
2. The following discussion of the teachings of the Mahdi is extracted from Wali, 1947, the earliest extensive collection of the traditions of the Mahdi. For a modern view of the doctrines, see Palanpuri, 1990.
3. Naturally, the precise social composition varied from region to region, with Sind having a somewhat larger Sufi component, gentry *(muluk)* being prominent particularly in Gujarat, and army officers with tribal connections, especially Afghans, dominating the movement in north India, Rajasthan, and the Deccan.
4. That is, Qazi Qadan, Shaikh Muhammad Uchhi, Darya Khan, and Shaikh Sadr al-Din Tattawi (Qani, 1886, v.3, pp. 54—5, 137—8, 216—18). Note that all four claimed saiyid descent, although that of Darya Khan was weakly supported.
5. All of the early Mahdawi proof literature is written in Arabic (see, e.g., Sajawandi, 1945), while the traditions and biographies of the Mahdi are written in Persian with a high percentage of Arabic. The *Insaf-nama*, e.g., while primarily in Persian contains entire sections in untranslated Arabic (Wali, 1947, pp. 59—63, 80—3, 146—50).
6. Faydi, Akbar's poet laureate, would have been acquainted with the Mahdawis and Ilahbad through his father, Shaikh Mubarak (a sympathizer) and Saiyid Yusuf, a Mahdawi who dedicated his biography of the Mahdi to Faydi (MacLean, forthcoming).
7. The intellectual challenge required action and explains the considerable energy expended on refutation of the Mahdawiyah by prominent contemporary scholars such as 'Ali al Muttaqi (d. ca. 975/1567). See GAL II, 503, S II, 518, for details of manuscripts. The need to produce works of refutation disappears in the second phase.
8. The text of the letter is preserved by Miyan Saiyid Yusuf (1954, pp. 61—2), a great grandson of the Mahdi, although its existence is hinted at by earlier sources (Wali, 1947, pp. 13—14).
9. It should be noted that the original tradition (Wali, 1947, 25) contains the jizya but not the sword swinging nor the *harbi* references. These are given as separate memories of the incident by Saiyid Khundmir (Ibid., 26), well known for his activist readings. A quietist reading would note that the Mahdi said *if* God granted the power, but God did not do so.
10. Unless otherwise cited, all subsequent references to the incident are from Wali (1947, 205—10). For subsequent readings of Saiyid Khundmir, see the detailed and complex discussion by Saiyid Burhan al-Din in the first volume of his *Hadiqat al-haqa'iq*.

11. See Sulayman, *Khatam* 12 (n.d., v.4, 256—497), for a long account of Mahdawi political connections. For a time, it seemed as if Burhan Nizam Shah (d. 961/1533) would opt for a Mahdawi legitimacy to differentiate his sultanate from his neighbours, although he would eventually opt for Shi'ism.

12. For the distinction, see the suggestion in Qasim, 1968, 12, and the outline in Mahmudi, 1968, pp. 466—8.

13. Thus Tipu Sultan would expel the Mahdawis from Srirangapatan in 1212/1797, and the Battle of Chanchalgudah would break out in Hyderabad in 1238/1822 as the Mahdawis, Shi'ites, and Sunnis struggled to influence the Nizam (Tashrifillahi, 1990, 281—3, 293—333). The tensions in Hyderabad would remain high.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

'Abd al-Rahman, S., 1948, *Sirat-I Imam Mahdi maw'ud*, Hyderabad, Jam'iyat-I Mahdawiyah (written c. 950/1543)

Abd al-Qasim, M., n.d. *Mubahathah-yi 'Alamgiri*, Hyderabad, Qawmi Press (written c. 1095/1683).

'Ali Muhammad Khan, 1930, *Khatimah-yi mir at-I Ahmadi*, ed. S. Nawab 'Ali Calcutta, Baptist Machine Press (written 1175/1761).

Ansari, A.S.B., 1963, 'Saiyid Muhammad Jawnpuri and his movement (A historic-heresiological study of the Mahdiyyah in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent)', *Islamic studies,* 2, pp. 41—74.

Badayuni, 'Abd Al-Qadir, 1865—69, *Muntakhab al-tawarikh*, ed. M. Ahmad 'Ali, 3 vols., Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal (written 1004/1595).

--,1972, *Najat al-rashid,* ed. S. Mu'in al-Haqq, Lahore, Idarah-yi Tahqiqat-I Pakistan (written 999/1590).

Burhan al-Din, M.S., n.d., *Hadiqat al-haqa'iq,* Kutub-khanah-yi Saiyid Muhamad Asad Allah Ishaqi (written 1058/1648).

--, 1959, *Shawahid al-wilayat,* Hyderabad, Jam'iyat-I Mahdawiyah (written 1052/1642).

Fadi Allah, M.S., n.d., *Intikhab al-mawalid,* Kutub-khanah-yi Saiyid Da'ud 'Alim Palanpuri (written 1158/1745).

Firishtah, M.Q.H., 1864—5, *Tarikh-I Firishtah*, 2 vols., Lucknow, Nawal Kisor (written c. 1015/1606).

Gulab Miyan, S., 1914, *TArikh-I Palanpur,* 3 vols., Delhi: Matba'-I Zaban. Hajji al-Dabir, 'A.M., 1970, *Zafar al-walih bi-Muzaffar wa-alihi.* Tr. M.F. Lokhandwala, Baroda, Oriental Institute (written before 1020/1611).

Husain 'Alim Saiyidan M.S., 1961, *Tadhkirat al-salihin,* Hyderabad, Jam'iyat-i Mahdawiyah (written 1106/1694).

Ibrahim, M.S., n.d., *Nasihat-nama,* Kutub-khanah-yi Saiyid Da'ud 'Alilm Palanpuri (written c. 1062/1651).

Ilahdad Hamid, M., 1892, *Kalam-I Ilahdad,* Hyderabad, Qawmi Press (written 911/1505).

Maclean, D.N., 2000, 'Real men and false men at the court of Akbar: The *Majalis* of Shaykh Mustafa Gujarati,' in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia,* Gainesville, University Press of Florida, pp. 199—215.

Mahmudi, S. Husain, 1892, *Diwan-I Mihri,* 2 vols., Hyderabad, Qawmi Press (written 930/1523).

Mustafa Gujarati, M.S., n.d., *Majalis*, Kutub-khanah-yi Saiyid Da'ud 'Alim Palanpuri (written before 983/1576).

Ni'mat Allah Khwajah, 1960—2, *Tarikh-I Khan Jahani wa makhzan-I Afghani* ed. S.M. Imam al-Din, 2 vols., Decca, Asiatic Society of Pakistan (written 1021/1612).

Nizami, K.A., 1989, *Akbar and Religion, Delhi:* Idarah-e-Adabiyat-e-Delli. Palanpuri, S. Khub Miyan, 1990, *Hudud-I da'ira-yi Mahdawiyah,* Hyderabad, Idarah-yi Tabligh-I Mahdawiyah (written 1352/1933).

Qani' Tattawi, M. 'Ali Sher, 1886, *Tuhfat al-kiram,* 3 vols., Lucknow, Matba'-I Nasiri (written 1181/1767).

Qasim Mujtahid, S., 1944, *jami' al-usul,* Hyderabad, Jam'iyat-i Mahdawiyah (written before 1043/1633).

--, 1968, *Shifa' al-mu'minin,* Hyderabad, Jam'iyat-I Mahdawiyah (written before 1038/1628).

Ruh Allah, M.S., 1952, *Panj fada'il,* Hyderabad, Jam'iyat-i Mahdawiyah (written 1094/1682).

Sajawandi, M. 'Abd al-Malik, 1945, *Siraj al-absar,* Hyderabad, Jam'iyat-i Mahdawiyah (written 960/1552).

Shihab al-Din 'Alim, M.S., 1963, *Mahiyat al-tasdiq,* Hyderabad: Jam'iyat-i Mahdawiya (written 1153/1740).

Sulayman Malik, M., n.d., *Khatam-I Sulaymani,* 4vols., Kutub-Khanah-yi Saiyid 'Abd al-Karim Yadillahi (written 1191/1777).

Tashrifillahi, M.S., 1990, *Muqaddimah-yi Siraj al-absar,* 3rd ed., rev., Hyderabad, I'jaz Printing Press.

Wali, B.M., 1947, *Insaf-nama,* Hyderabad, Shamsiyah (written before 950/1543).

Yasin, M., 1974, *A Social History of Islamic India,* 1605—1748, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal.

Yusuf, M.S., 1954, *matla' al-wilayat,* Hyderabad, Jam'iyat-i Mahdawiyah (written 1016/1607).