

Investigation Into Al-Mutanabbī's Claim Of Prophethood

Anisa¹, Dr Muzaffar Ali², Dr Ismail Muhammad Amin³, Dr Nasrullah Quraishi³, Altaf
Ahmed⁴

¹Teaching Assistant, Department of Islamic Culture, University of Art and Culture Jamshoro

²(Lecturer Department of Islamic studies NUML Islamabad)

³Assistant Professor Department of Hadith, IIUI

³(Lecturer Department of Islamic studies NUML Islamabad)

⁴(Lecturer Department of Islamic studies NUML Islamabad)

Abstract

This paper is the study of a very crucial issue of Islamic and Arabic literature, which deals with the attribution to al-Mutanabbī, (d. 965 CE) regarded as a last great classical poet of 'Abbāsīd period, that he claimed to be a prophet in terminological religious meaning. For this, opinions of various Islamic and literary scholars and biography of al-Mutanabbī was studied carefully to arrive at conclusion. For this purpose, not only classical Muslim scholars were studied but also the works of modern scholars were investigated. In order to have more clarified and well-informed conclusion, the works of orientalist were also consulted. After the careful study and mindful investigation, this paper argues that the attribution of the claim of prophecy in terminological religious meaning to al-Mutanabbī has not been proved on unequivocal and strong undeniable evidence and arguments, which are necessarily required for this severe accusation on any Muslim scholar of the time.

Keywords: Mutanabbī, Claim of prophecy, Investigation.

Introduction

Abū al-Ṭayyib Aḥmad b. al-Ḥussain al-Mutanabbī¹ (915-965 CE), flourished in Iraq, is a famous Arab poet and sage of 'Abbāsīd period, known for his distinctive great poetry. Al-Mutanabbī's poetry puzzled many people of that time and made it difficult for them to understand its purposes. This is why Ibn Rashīq called him as "the preoccupier of the people".² It is worth noting that al-Mutanabbī's poetry received more attention and care of the scholars than rest of the poets of Islamic Arabic literature. Considered by many to

represent the quintessence of Arab culture, al-Mutanabbī and his poetry have been the focus of numerous popular modern plays and the poet even became the subject of Iraqi television series in 1984.

Al-Mutanabbī and his poetry have been extensively studied, especially by Arab scholars. Kurkis and Mikha'il 'Awwād's extensive bibliography of editions, translations and studies of al-Mutanabbī's poetry, *Guide to the study of al-Mutanabbī*, covers over four hundred printed pages.³

Al-Mutanabbī left behind him a large number of diverse poems, which numbered three hundred and twenty-six poems. These poems are considered a historical record of the events of his time in the fourth/tenth century. These poems are also considered a biography of this great poet, through which the reader can learn how wisdom took place on his tongue and how it developed with the passage of time, especially in his last poems before his death. These poems are now published as "Dīwān al-Mutanabbī" and a selection of which is translated into English by Arberry, A. J., titled "Poems of al-Mutanabbī", published by the Cambridge University Press, London in 1967.

With this brief introduction, it is worth mentioning that there are numerous accounts that deal with the reason why the poet Abu Al-Ṭayyib was named as Al-Mutanabbī, and some of them concluded that Al-Mutanabbī was so named because he claimed to be a prophethood as Mutanabbī in Arabic means "a would-be prophet". While other scholars are of the view that he took this name for some other reasons not for the reason that he claimed to be a prophet in terminological religious connotation. The following discussion shows the opinions related to the reasons for al-Mutanabbī to name himself as al-Mutanabbī.

Scholars' views concerning al-Mutanabbī's Claim of Prophecy

Ibn Khalikān mentioned in his book "Wafayāt al-A'yān"⁴ and Nāṣif al-Yāzjī in his book "al-'Arf al-Ṭayyib"⁵, a commentary on al-Mutanabbī's Dīwān stated that al-Mutanabbī is reported to have claimed prophethood during his stay in the desert of Samāwah - between Kūfah and the Syria - in which he resided for a period of time, influenced by the Qarmatians, who considered the advocates of their creed to be prophets. According to al-Yāzjī, as al-Mutanabbī was one of their advocates and he called himself a prophet, and in addition to that, the 'Abbāsīd Empire at that time was facing political rivalries and movements aimed at political dominance and authority.⁶

Another opinion is that he was called Al-Mutanabbī because of verses he said in his youth that suggest his transcendence and the greatness of his pride, and he compared himself to the Jesus Christ peace be upon him among the Jews and to the strangeness of the Prophet Ṣāliḥ peace be upon him among the nation of Thamūd in the following verses⁷:

ما مقامي بأرض نخلة إلا

كمقام المسح بين اليهود

أنا في أمة تداركها الله

غريب كصالح في ثمود

It was also said that what is meant by the prophecy he claimed is his poetic and linguistic expertise, not terminological religious prophecy, and they cited verses that he had composed and said in them: I am the Lord of dew, and the Lord of rhymes, and the poison of adversity, and the wrath of the envious.

أنا رب الندي ورب القوافي

وسمام العدي وغيظ الحسود

Abu al-Tayyib denied his claim to prophethood several times, and when he was asked about the meaning of the name of al-Mutanabbī, he said: “I am the first to prophesy poetry”.

Shawqī Dhaif, a great Arabic literary scholar, believes that either it was he who called himself al-Mutanabbī, or perhaps some admirers and fans of his poetry who called him, a symbol of genius and that he brings in his poems a miracle that has no precedent.⁸

The piety of al-Mutanabbī

Professor Maḥmūd Shākir rejects the idea of al-Mutanabbī’s claim to be a terminological religious prophet, and attributed his nickname as al-Mutanabbī to some other reasons, including that al-Mutanabbī was known for his piety, chastity and abstention from immorality such as lying, adultery and other sins, and he was also known for his preoccupation and seriousness in seeking knowledge, and he enjoyed a high status among the imams of language and literature, such as ibn Jinnī and Abī Alī al-Fārsī. Professor Shākir further states that al-Mutanabbī mentioned the prophets in his poetry in his youth that he was to compare himself to them, and to measure the morals of his praised ones to theirs.⁹

Abu Al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, he was skeptical and did not believe al-Mutanabbī’s claim to prophethood, as he stated in his book “The Message of Forgiveness” that if al-Mutanabbī was asked about the reason for calling him by this title, he would reply: “He is from the Prophet, meaning the one who is elevated from the earth.” al-Ma‘arrī said, defending al-Mutanabbī: and he had coveted something in which he was coveted by those below him, but they are measures that are gained by the one who succeeds and the mujtahid does not take into account of his failure, and things in his book indicate that he was deified, and if he returns to the facts, then the utterance of the tongue does not indicate a person’s belief, because the scholar is forced to Lying and hypocrisy, and it is possible that a man may appear religious by speech, but only wants to reach praise or a goal, and perhaps a group has gone outwardly worshipers and inwardly atheists.¹⁰

Classification of the scholars on the claim of prophecy of Al-Mutanabbī

The issue of Abu al-Tayyib's claim to prophethood occupied the minds of scholars of the past and present, and their opinions differed on this issue, and their positions varied, and they may be divided into three categories as follows¹¹:

1. This group agree that Al-Mutanabbī had claimed Prophecy in fact, and among these scholars are classical and modern. Among classical scholars are ibn Khaldūn, and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghḍādī, and among modern scholars are Sa'īd al-Afghānī.
2. This group seems to be reluctant in expressing their opinion and did not confirm the validity of that claim, however, they also did not deny it. Among the classical scholars in this group are al-Tha'ālabī, and among modern scholars are 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād.
3. This group rejects that al-Mutanabbī had claimed prophethood, and among these were Abū al-'Alā al-Ma'arrī, one of the classical scholars, and among the modern scholars, Ṭāhā Ḥussain, Maḥmūd Shākir, 'Abd al-Wahhāb 'Azzām, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān Shu'aib, 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Mallāḥ, to name a few. In addition, the group of Orientalists including Blacher, Brockelman, and Massignon, in supports of above-mentioned Muslim scholars also rejects al-Mutanabbī's claim to prophethood.

The discussion of some of the opinions of modern scholars on the issue of al-Mutanabbī's claim to prophethood is as follows:

1. Peter al-Bustānī: He indicates that there are things in al-Mutanabbī's book that indicate that he was deified such as comparing himself to the prophets, however, this deification in poetry is not sufficient evidence to prove his claim to prophethood.¹²
2. Dr 'Abd al-Wahhāb 'Azzām: He rejects the idea of this claim.¹³
3. Maḥmūd Shākir: He also rejects this claim, and he denied the Qur'ān that had been attributed to al-Mutanabbī, and he refused that al-Mutanabbī was sent to prison because of his claim of prophethood. In his opinion, al-Mutanabbī was sent to prison because of his affiliation with 'Alwī uprising and revolt.¹⁴
4. Ṭāhā Ḥussain: He clearly holds the opinion by saying that: "And I do not hesitate to reject the fact that he claimed prophethood, performed miracles or claimed to have performed them, and misled a group of the elite or common people, just as I do not hesitate to reject this absurdity that predicts that al-Mutanabbī claimed that the Qur'ān was revealed on him."¹⁵
5. Dr Muṣṭafā al-Shaka'ah: He takes a neutral position as he neither denies the accusation on the authority of al-Mutanabbī nor does he prove it by saying that: "I had a tendency that al-Mutanabbī had done it and claimed to be a prophet. However, have reviewed my thought and my goal is not to prove or to disprove it, rather what I aim is to provide evidence and arguments that does not completely deny this accusation on al-Mutanabbī."¹⁶

6. Dr 'Abdullāh al-Ṭayyib: It was noted that he did not mention the title al-Mutanabbī in his book “with Abū al-Ṭayyib.” If this, not mentioning this title, means anything then it indicates that Dr 'Abdullāh did not want to delve into the idea of Abu al-Mutanabbī's prophecy, and that he does not believe in this idea.¹⁷
7. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Shu'aib: He maintains that al-Mutanabbī did not claim to be a prophet and that this claim was a slander or a political matter by which al-Mutanabbī desired to seize political power in the country.¹⁸

Conclusion

From the above-mentioned detailed discussion that it may safely be concluded that attribution of mere title al-Mutanabbī to Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī does not mean, in any way, that he claimed to be a prophet in terminological religious connotation which is considered apostasy in Islam. In addition, the clear denial and rejection of al-Mutanabbī on various occasions also strongly suggest that he never claimed to be a religious prophet. Furthermore, considerable number of classical as well as Modern Muslim scholars including the Orientalists tend to reject the idea that al-Mutanabbī claimed to be a religious prophet. They not only give satisfactory explanations of the title al-Mutanabbī but also give reasons behind his imprisonment.

References

-
- ¹ Hamori, Andras P., al-Mutanabbī, Encyclopaedia of Islam, 3rd Ed., E.J. Brill, Netherlands.
 - ² Al-Qairawānī, Ibn Rashīq, Abul Hasan, al-'Umdah fī maḥāsin al-shi'r wa adabihi wa naqdihi, Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1981.
 - ³ Larkin, Margaret, al-Mutanabbī, Oxford: Oneworld publications, 2008, p. viii
 - ⁴ Ibn Khallikān, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, Wafayāt al-A'yān, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1900, V. 1, p.122.
 - ⁵ Al-Yāzjī, Nāṣif, Beirut: Sharikah Dār al-Aeqam bin Abī al-Arqam, p. 23.
 - ⁶ Ibid.
 - ⁷ Ṣāmb, Ibrāhīm, al-Khaṣā'ish al-fanniyyah wa al-Ma'nawīyyah fī Madā'ih Abī al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī, Senegal: Jāmi'ah Shaikh Ant Job bidakār, pp. 15-17.
 - ⁸ Aḥmad, Yūsuf, al-Kāfūriyāt wa al-'Aḍudiyāt fī Shi'r al-Mutanabbī, Sudan: Umm Dirmān Islamic University, pp. 13-17.
 - ⁹ Shākir, Maḥmūd, Nubuwwah al-Mutanabbī, published in Majallah al-Risālah, Cairo, Vol. 167, 1936, pp. 1701-4.

See also Al-Ṭanāhī, Maḥmūd, *Fi al-Lughah wa al-Adab: Dirāsāt wa Buḥūth*, Morocco: Dār al-Gharb al-Islamī, Vol.

1, pp.

218-19.

¹⁰ Al-‘Aqqād, ‘Abbās Maḥmūd, *Muṭāla’āt fī al-Kutub wa al-Ḥayāt*, p.121.

¹¹ Ḥussain, Shalūf, *Shi’r al-Ḥikmah ‘inda al-Mutanabbī*, Baina al-Naz‘ah al-‘Aqliyyah wa al-Mutaṭallbāt al-fanniyyah,

Algeria: Jami‘ah al-Ukhuwwah Mantaurī, pp.61-62.

¹² Al-Ṭanāhī, *Op. cit.*

¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 210-.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 211.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 212.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 222.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 223.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 225.