Journ.Soc.Sci.&Humn. 1996/2000
pp.107-114

DARIYA - ONCE THE GLAMOROUS CAPITAL OF ALE - SAUD

Dr Nigar Sajjad Zaheer

Abstract

The Beautiful town of Dariya in Najd, Saudi Arabia, was the capital of the House of Saud till 1818 A. D. It was captured and smashed by Egyptian Army (under the rule of Osmanli Turks) first in 1818 and then again in 1820. A. D. and now Dariya is nothing but ruins.

It visited Dariya twice in 1991 and highly inspired by the ruins of the town, a remarkable chapter of History of the Muslim. Much has been written on post-Dariya period but less has been product about Dariya itself.

The ruins initiated me to write out this article about the history of Dariya - once the glamorous capital of Ale-Saud.

DARIYA: ONCE THE GLAMOROUS CAPITAL OF ALE-SAUD

Dariya, the capital of house of Saud till 1818 A.D./1234 A.H. was a small town of wadi Hanifa in Najd, situated about 20 km. Northwest of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia.

The Dariya oasis lay in the deep valley of wadi Hanifa, some 500 yards wide on the average and extending about four miles from north to south, with dense palm-groves on either side of the flood channel (Lake Hanifa) to the 100-ft. cliffs on both banks. In the groves lay a number of hamlets or villages occupied by the bulk of the permanent population, while above them towered the citadel of 'Al-Turaif' ("The noblest monument in wahaniland")[1] perched on a projection of the cliff on the western or right bank and occupied by the palaces and mansions of the Saud family and other amenities of an Arab town. The citadel was separated from he adjacent Right Bank by a deep gully, on the other side of which lived the artisans and other folk of low degree. Outside this suburb wall, dotted with towers and turrets, ran across the base of a wide eastward bulge of the wadi, while a similar and considerably longer wall followed the cliff line of the eastern or left bank of the valley in a shallow arc.[2]

Just opposite the citadel of Turaif on the eastern or left bank Buhairi[3] an estate of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab and his descendants (Ale-Sheikh)[4] was situated. At the place of Sheikh's prayer a mosque (Masjid -e-Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab) has been erected by the Saudi rulers, still existing. His grave is also near the mosque.

Nearly all palaces, mansions, and building of Dariya were made of mud with stony pillars. Many palaces and building were double storey. Roofs were made of mud and big palm or other leaves, supported by big logs.

Ruins of Dariya has a lot of attraction for tourists.[5] Upon entering the town of Old Dariya [6], it is hard to believe that two hundred years ago it was a cosmopolitan city with five thousand residents and one thousand visitors used to come to the city daily. Ancestors of the present Saudi King Fahad bin Abdul Aziz, lived and ruled from the citadel of Dariya, called Al-Turaif.

At the advent of Islam Dariya was only a pasture. Hadrat Omar (634 - 644 A. D/ 13-23 A. H) declared it as "Hama", a safe and government grazing ground for military purpose. An area of about six miles diameter was reserved for 300 horses and 30,000 camels. Hadrat Othman (644 - 656 A. D/ 23-35 A. H) extended its area to 10 miles diameter. Dariya remained at the same position up to the region of Umayyads.

But afterwards its condition gradually changed. During Abbassid regime, especially after the region of Mahdi Son of Mansur (775 - 785 A. D./ 158-169 A. H) Najd become such a neglected area, that one could not find any trace of Dariya. It might be someone's private property and not more than that.

Then again in 15th century, one can trace out Dariya as a farming village and the property of Ameer of Riyadh Ibn Oira. He presented this property to his cousin Mani al Muraidi (or his father Rabia)[8] in 1446 A .D. /850 A. H., the earliest traceable ancestors of Ale Saud.

In those days Hijaz was completely independent under the Sharifs, while the whole of Najd i.e., central Arabia was divided into a number of these city-state [9] enjoying complete independence.

There was total political disorder as these states of Najd were fighting against each other and were attacked by Hijaz several times.[10] Trade routes were quiet unsafe so much so that local products could not be exported, and the people of Najd were compelled to sell their wares in local markets.[11] On the socio-religious plane the situation was perhaps even more depressing.

With the passage of time, new practices had crept into use, which were against the teachings of holy Prophet Mohammed (SAAS). Innovations had obtained currency and superstitions had spread, which were not different from idolatry. The commandments of the Quran were broken frequently. How Dariya could keep itself aloof from all these impurities, when these spread all over the Arab? So even in Dariya Islam had sunk into impiety. A tomb (near a cave)[12] of Bintual Ameer had been worshipped by them. There were some holy trees and orchards, to them the people had prayed for their desires. They used to make the circuit of a holy tree, name Turfia [13]. They became the disciples of a so-called saint, named Taj [14], a blind, old man and a dweller of Al-Kharj[15] about whom they believed that he

came from his native town to Dariya without any guide or helper and the people used to present valuable gifts and oblations at his feet.

This worst socio-political condition of Dariya had been completely changed at the arrival of Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab[16] in 1744 A.D./11157 A.H., a famous religious preacher and reviver of Islam in 18th Century, his message was indeed a reiteration of the teaching of the great Islamic revivalist Ahmad Ibn Taemiya in 14th Century, who in turn was inspired by the great Imam, Ahmad Ibn Hambal in 9th Century, a founder of one of the four orthodox schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab was a reformer not in the sense that he desired to bring a change in the doctrines of Islam or tried to give a new interpretation of its tenets, but in the sense that he felt it his mission to denounce innovations and accretions and preach for a return to Islam's former purity[17]. He called for a return to the simple and pure beliefs, primitive austerity, and strict applications of Islamic law. He condemned prevalent saint worship and animistic rituals, indulgence in luxuries and sensuality and demanded for the application of the Quranic injunctions[18].

At his arrival at Dariya, Mohammed Bin Saud Al Muqrin, the then chieftain of Dariya welcomed him. Both the leaders made a pact to work together "to accomplish the divine will and restore its lost unity to the Arab people [19]". This pact changed the course of history in the peninsula and was the starting point of the expansion of Dariya's influence.

Spiritual power of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab and military abilities of Mohammed bin Saud combined, as a result of that, within half a century whole of the Arabia came under the influence of Dariya and Ale-Saud.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab's arrival at Dariya was a historic event. People of surrounding areas started coming to Dariya and over a thousand visitors used to come daily.[20] These visitors were actually the scholars who wanted to get Islamic knowledge from the Sheikh who delivered lectures from morning to evening. Those lectures on pure Islam were attended by thousands of pupils from all over the Najd. To accommodate them a four-storey building was built near three palaces in the main Salwa street at Al-Turaif. The Ameer offered hospitality. In some cases, some pupil had to serve somewhere at night for earning and attended Sheikh's lectures during daytime. According to Ibn Bashir his School was extremely crowded. In the following years Sheikh sent some of his students as preachers throughout Najd, Hijaz and neighbouring countries, and also sent letters to important personalities. Due to Sheikh's presence Dariya became a centre of excellence and it found changes not only in religious dimension but also in all of the branches of life i.e. social economical and political etc.

When Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab arrived at Dariya he found Ameer of Dariya Mohammed bin Saud Al-Muqrin as a less important Chieftain of the area. The

Banu Khalid of Hasa and the coastal district, the Sadun of lower Iraq, the Sadat of Najran, the Imams of Yamen or the Sultan of Oman were much stronger than ale-Saud. None of them matched the realm and power of the 'Sahrifs' of Hijaz [21].

But the years following 1744 A.D./1157 A.H. saw regular military campaigns. Consequently, during the next fifteen years or so, Saudi-Wahabi raid and Wahabi religious message enabled Ibn Saud to bring much of Najd excluding Riyadh, under his control.

Mohammed bin Saud died in 1765 A.D./1157 A.H. and was succeeded by his son Abdul Aziz (R. 1765-1803 A.D./1157-1218 A.H). Under Abdul Aziz, the Wahabi movement gained new momentum, and the Wahabi forces, ably led by Abdul Aziz's eldest son, Saud, were victorious in all directions. To the east they captured Qatif (an oasis inhabited by sectarian Shiites) and Hasa. To the South they reached the great 'Empty Quarter' and made there was upto Hadarmaut. From there they spilled down in to the lowland of the Tihmama along the Red Sea, reaching as far South as the parts of Yemen. To the north, they advanced into Iraqi and Syrian deserts and captured in 1801 A.D./1216 A.H. Karbala, Taif in 1802 A.D./1217 A.H., Macca in 1803 A.D./1218 A.H. Shortly thereafter Abdul Aziz was assassinated in his capital Dariya, while performing the Friday Prayer in the 'Masjid-e-Turaif'. "The assassin was a person whose three sons had been massacred in Karbala. He had pretended to convert to Wahabism and had worked in the Wahabi capital (Dariya) for a year awaiting an opportunity to avenge his children's assassination" [22].

During the 38 years of Abdul Aziz's reign, Dariya achieved international status. Some diplomats had came to Dariya during his lifetime and after. In 1799 A.D./1214 A.H. the first European diplomat J.L. Reinaud arrived at Dariya to negotiate for the East India Company. Napoleon Bonapart sent there a diplomatic agent M.De. Lascaris. He reached Dariya by the end of 1811 A.D./1226 A.H. and had a number of secret meetings with the Wahabi Imam [23].

Abdul Aziz also made some important defensive attempts in Dariya to keep it safe from enemies. He fortified protection walls around the city as like most mediaeval cities, Dariya was also surrounded by walls. Ruins of these walls and watchtower some built into the wall and some free standing can be seen even to day.

Abdul Aziz was followed by his eldest son. Saud (r. 1803-1814 A.D./1218-1230 A.H.). He was an enthusiastic Wahabi and a most capable military leader. He was responsible for most of the conquests during his father's lifetime and during his own reign. He brought the Wahabi movement to the height of its power [24]. In brief, at the beginning of the 19th century the whole of Arabia including two holy cities Macca and Madina were practically under the control of Ale-Saud and their capital was Dariya. Ibn Bishr and a Portuguese traveller J.L. Reinaud wrote detailed statements about Dariya in those days. As they had become a great threat for Ottoman Empire, particularly at the loss of the two holy cities they could not be tolerated. Therefore, Mohammed Ali of Egypt was appointed by Ottoman Sultan, as a viceroy of Hijaz with the orders to uproot the Wahabis.

The Egyptian Campaign in Arabia lasted for seven years and ended in a victory for Mohammed Ali. The Holy Cities were delivered Madina in Oct. 1812 A.D./1227 A.H. and Macca in Jan. 1813 A.D./1228 A.H. In April 1814 A.D./1230 A.H. Saud died. According to Philby, Saud died suddenly of fever at Dariya, while J.B. Mechin stated in 'Arabian Destiny' that he was assassinated. His death was a serious set back for Dariya, and for the Wahabi cause.

Saud was succeeded by his son Abdullah bin Saud (r. 1814-1818 A.D./1230-1234 A.H.) but unfortunately at the very beginning of his reign he was challenged by his uncle, Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Saud, who considered himself as a prior claimant, because he was the son of Mohammed bin Saud, the founder of the Saudi Wahabi realm in Dariya. Abdullah bin Saud defeated his uncle, but dissension had set in and general opponents of Abdullah and of the Saud, as well as the fickle minded Bedouin tribes turned to Mohammed Ali for Support [25] resulting in complete destruction of Dariya.

Ibrahim Pasha, a son of Mohammed Ali landed in the Hijaz with 2,000 infantry and 1,500 cavalry in Sept. 1816 A.D. and advanced systematically rallying defecting tribes as he went. In April 1818 A.D./1233 A.H. he finally appeared before the walls of Dariya with a force of 2,000 cavalry, 5,600 infantry 12 guns and a multitude of tribesmen.

In the beginning the Egyptian army was defeated but ultimately they sieged Dariya Abdullah stood against the siege for six month [26]. But could not save himself from defeat visualising his ultimate defeat he offered surrender with some conditions. These were:

(i) Pardon for the troops that had remained faithful to him.
(ii) Pardon for his brother and family members.
(iii) The preservation of the town (Dariya).
(iv) Safety for his own person[27].

Ibrahim agreed to the first two requests, but did not promise in respect of the beautiful town of Dariya. As to the fourth request he said that he could give him guarantee till his arrival at Cairo but he could say nothing what was waiting for him at Cairo; that would depend upon the will of Sultan Mahmood II. The 35th Ottoman Sultan (r. 1808-1839 A.D./1223-1255 A.H.)

Abdullah complied. He was sent to Cairo, and then to Constantinople upon the orders of Sultan Mohammed II. There he was loaded with Chains, forced to March for three days through the city and was then decapitated in front of the mosque of saint Sophia[28]. His dead body was exposed in public for a week and was then abandoned for the stray dogs.

Ibrahim Pasha razed Dariya. He razed all forts, dismantled every fence and collected some 400 members of the House of Saud and Sheikh family whom he deported to Cairo[29]

In 1820 A.D./1236 A.H. Mishari bin Saud tried to get power in Dariya. During the same days. Turkey bin Abdullah a nephew of Saud the great came to Najd, after getting freedom from Ibrahim Pasha. He joined Mishari bin Saud. Again Egyptian forces hurried to Dariya. Turkey was captured and then exiled, while Mishari was captured by the Egyptian army.

(Mishari died in 1821 A.D./1237 A.H. in prison) Dariya was razed second time in 1821 A.D. by a new commander of Egyptian army Hussein Bay.

After a couple of years in 1824 A.D./1240 A.H. Turkey again gained power. He defeated Egyptian army at Riyadh, captured it, and proclaimed Riyadh as his new capital. And that was the tragic end of Dariya's political power and spiritual supremacy. Once the glamorous capital of Ale-Saud.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. H. St. J. Philby *'Saudi Arabia'*, Ernest Benn Ltd; London, 1955, p. 138.

2. Ibid.

3. *'Urdu Encyclopaedia of Islam'*, the University of Punjab, Lahore, 1972. (article 'Dariya' written by G. Rentz) Vol. IX, p. 257.

4. Successors of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab are called 'Ale-Sahikh' in Saudi Arabia and hold highly honourable Status in the Community.

5. The authors visited Dariya twice on 4th October 1991 and December 1991.

6. A new beautiful and modern town with the name of 'New Dariya' is under construction, near the ruins of Dariya, which is now called 'Old Dariya'.

7. *'Urdu Encyclopaedia of Islam'*, vol. XXII, p. 131 (article 'Najd' written by Adlof Grohman)

8. Philby, p. 8.

9. According to Philby, these states were "Probably little more than local baronies". (Saudi Arabia, p. 10).

10. The first such raid of which we are told by Ibn Bishr, took place in 1578 A.D. which followed by a number of attacks. (Ibn Bisher 'unwan al Majid fi Tarikh-e-Najd, Cairo, 1943).

11. Attar, M. Abdul Ghafoor '*Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab'* Macca, 1967, p. 37.

12. Ibn Ghannam, Sheikh Hussein *'Tarikh-e-Najd' (Rawdatul Afkar wal Afham').* Beirut, 1985, p. 15.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. The authors visited 'Al-Kharj' on 3rd January 1992, this beautiful Oasis is about 80 km. from old Dariya.

16. Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab bin Suleman Tamimi born at Ayania in 1703 A.D./1115 A.H. belonged to Tamim tribe. He learnt the Quran by heart at the age of ten. He had made several journeys to Damascus, Baghdad, Basra and Iran for studying theology and became imbued with a passionate zeal for reform. He had started a campaign for the purification of Islam. But unfortunately he had not been appreciated by the Chieftain of his native town Ayania. He achieved some success at Ayania, before being driven out first to Harimala and then to Dariya in 1744.

17. Ibn Ghannam, p. 38.

18. George Antonius *'The Arab Awakening London',* 1961, p. 22.

19. Jacques Benist-Mechin *'Arabian Destiny'*, (translated from French by Denis Weaver) London, 1957, p. 49.

20. Nadvi, Masood Alam *'Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab'* Lahore, 1361 A.H. p. 43.

21. Safran Nadav *'Saudi Arabia, the ceaseless quest for Security'* Cornell University press, Ithaca and London, 1985, p. 10.

22. Ibid. p. 12.

23. Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab died in 1791 A.D./1206 A.H. had left five sons, who continued his mission.

24. Safran Nadav, p. 12

25. Ibid. p. 13.

26. Philby, *'Saudi Arabia'* gave detailed statement about war like

strategy of the opponents.

27. Safran Nadav p. 14 (According to Attar Abdullah had surrendered unconditionally p. 26

28. Mechin *'Arabian Destiny'* p. 53.

29. Ibid.