

## Chapter 13: The Muslim Empire

Mu'awiya's extremely cunning nature was augmented by the advice and support of Marwan and Amr bin al-Aas. Besides his cruel nature, Mu'awiya was extremely cunning. When his attempts to search for defects in Imam Ali (a.s.) failed, he commenced the practice of praising the Banu Umayya the inveterate enemies of Imam Ali (a.s.), by inventing and propagating false traditions attributed to the Prophet (S). Mu'awiya bribed his henchmen and arranged for the propagation of daily calumnies and falsehoods against Imam Ali (a.s.) from on the pulpits after every prayer in every mosque of Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. Any leader of the congregational prayers, who was not amenable to his bribes or threats, was ruthlessly removed or killed, and in the vacancy, Mu'awiya's cronies were appointed. The propaganda was so fierce and systematic that soon people started comparing Mu'awiya with Imam Ali (a.s.).<sup>1</sup> The propaganda was so vicious that when the news of Imam Ali's martyrdom during offering the prayer in the mosque of Kufa reached the people of Syria, they wondered how Ali could have been killed in the mosque when he never attended any prayer.

Mu'awiya retained the control of Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, which he got in the early days of the Caliphate and appointed his kin and sycophants as his trusted advisors and representatives in various provinces. Except for an opportunistic and hypocritical conversion, neither Mu'awiya nor his father Abu Sufyan or his son Yazid had any regard or affinity for Islam. Abu Sufyan was from the Kuffar (disbelievers) of Mecca and he remained so. The Qur'an reveals that the Kuffar of Mecca asserted that there would be no other life than the one in this world; that there would be no life hereafter, and none would be resurrected or held accountable for his deeds.<sup>2</sup> This philosophy was imbibed in the Banu Umayya in general and Abu Sufyan, Mu'awiya, and Yazid in particular, and was the cause of their cruel nature. They always held the view that there would be no life hereafter and no accounting for one's deeds. They proclaimed that the Prophet (S) had invented these as myths in order to gain worldly power. It is their greed that converted Islam into a Muslim Empire by expanding territories and accumulating huge amount of illicit wealth, and in the process abandoning the spirit of Islam. Islam that emerged, during their rule, bore only a miniscule outward resemblance to the Islam propagated by the Prophet (S). In the hands of the Banu Umayya, Islam was devoid of its true spirit, philosophy, and the concept of God and the moral and ethical life and standards taught by the Prophet (S). Abu Sufyan, his son Mu'awiya and grandson Yazid abhorred the Divine commandments that demanded Muslims to lead a virtuous, pious, and

peaceful life of coexistence with people holding different beliefs.

Mu'awiya's denial of the afterlife and accountability naturally led him to addiction to all sorts of vices and the temerity to commit great atrocities against the poor. He harassed, persecuted, tortured or killed the companions of the Prophet (S) who resented his way of interpreting the way of life prescribed under Islam. He annihilated those who were even suspected to be sympathetic to Imam Ali (a.s.) or the *Ahlul Bayt* (a.s.). Cunning as he was, Mu'awiya carried out in public, the pretension of being a Muslim, lest the power he gained as the head of the Islamic state be wrenched away by the public. Slowly, but systematically, he eroded minor injunctions of Islam, by letting go the transgressors and later rewarding those who could fallaciously justify their irreligious acts. He used the public funds not only to aggrandize himself but also to eliminate or silence any opposition and to purchase support.

His appointees to higher posts had no knowledge of Islam or any other sciences, but were well-versed in every evil trade and act. One of the governors, while drunken, offered four rak'as in the Morning Prayer instead of the obligatory two, and mockingly he told the congregation that, if they were not tired, he could perform several more. His son, Yazid used to make fun of Islam in the open court. Yazid's conduct eroded the credibility and quality of Islam, causing great anxiety to the Imams (S) as well as the surviving companions of the Prophet (S) who were the true Muslims of the time. Simon Oakley wrote: "Among my authorities, I find one who, when treating of Hasan's death, asserted that, in the treaties between him and Mu'awiya, it has been stipulated that Mu'awiya should never appoint a successor so long as Hasan lived, but should leave, as Umar had before, the election in the hands of a certain number of persons to be nominated by Hasan. Mu'awiya, therefore, being desirous of leaving the Caliphate to his son Yazid and thinking that he could not bring about his design so long as Hasan was alive, determined to get rid of him."<sup>3</sup>

Mu'awiya hatched a plan to eliminate Imam Hasan (a.s.). Imam Hasan (a.s.) was poisoned by one of his wives at the instance of Mu'awiya who promised that he would get her married to his son Yazid. In his last moments, Imam Hasan (a.s.) expressed his wish to be buried beside his grandfather the Holy Prophet (S) and in the event of any opposition, to bury him at the common burial ground of al-Baqee', so that any conflict and consequent division among Muslims might be averted. When Imam Husayn (a.s.) took the bier in order to bury Imam Hasan (a.s.) beside the Prophet's tomb, Mu'awiya incited Aa'isha to have arrows showered on the coffin of Imam Hasan (a.s.). Thus, Imam Husayn (a.s.) was prevented from fulfilling the last wish of his brother. Imam Hasan (a.s.) was then buried in the graveyard of al-Baqee' in Medina.

The martyrdom of Imam Hasan (a.s.), further emboldened Mu'awiya in his evil designs. He issued orders that any one praising Imam Ali (S) or found relating traditions in praise of him or the *Ahlul Bayt* (a.s.) should at once be beheaded, hanged, and cut into pieces. He also instructed the leaders of congregations in every mosque to curse, blaspheme, and spread falsehood about Imam Ali (a.s.) and the *Ahlul Bayt* (a.s.) and amply rewarded those who complied with this order. The greed of people

encouraged them to invent ever-new traditions falsely attributed to the Prophet (S), praising the open enemies of Islam such as Marwan, Abu Sufyan, Mu'awiya... etc.

On the other hand, those, who refused to praise the Banu Umayya and other enemies of Islam, were punished severely. Maytham at-Tammar, who refused to curse Imam Ali (a.s.), was tortured, his limbs were torn apart, and his tongue was pulled out. His body was hung at the city center as a warning to those who did not obey Mu'awiya's orders. Hijr bin Adiy al-Kindi (the great companion) was slaughtered for the same reason. Muhammad, son of the first *Caliph* Abu Bakr, who had special love and regard for Imam Ali (a.s.), was killed and his body was stuffed in the skin of a donkey and was burnt. In the city of Basra alone, eight thousand persons, who declared their love and obedience for Imam Ali (a.s.) as a part of their faith, were meticulously traced and brutally killed. The pensions of those, who were weak, disabled, old or orphans, was stopped if they were even suspected of entertaining any affection towards the *Ahlul Bayt* (a.s.).[4](#)

After Imam Hasan (a.s.) had been poisoned, Imam Husayn (a.s.) lived peacefully in Medina, imparting religious teachings and had a great number of companions and followers. Mu'awiya, who had expanded his control over various provinces, started to disclose his desire to appoint his son Yazid as his successor. He was able to secure the assent of the Syrians and some people in Iraq and Egypt. Mu'awiya's representative in Medina wrote to him stating that the people of Medina were not in favour of Yazid to succeed Mu'awiya. Aa'isha, Imam Husayn (a.s.), Abdullah Bin Umar, Abdurrahman bin Abu Bakr, Abdullah bin az-Zubair and others were mentioned as the opponents. Mu'awiya came to Medina and from on the pulpit of the Holy Prophet (S) he started to praise Yazid and suggested his name as the successor after him. Aa'isha interrupted him, shouted from her room, and asked which precedent Mu'awiya was following in nominating his son, when the earlier Caliphs did not appoint their sons.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) then got up and said that Yazid, being a flouter of basic Islamic principles, a known debauch, gambler and drunkard was not fit to be the ruler of the Islamic world. Imam Husayn (a.s.) suggested that it was essential to discuss the character of Yazid in a public meeting and discussion.[5](#)

Mu'awiya instructed Yazid to proceed to Medina via Mecca on the pretext of performing the Hajj and to give lavish gifts to the people of Medina and Mecca, in order to create an impression of his piety and generosity. To some extent, the ruse worked and people were deceived by the ostentatious gifts from Yazid.

Mu'awiya, under the advice of Marwan and Amr bin al-Aas then, proposed that he would later call a public meeting to know people's preference regarding the matter of his succession. He assured Imam Husayn (a.s.), Abdullah bin Abbas, Abdullah Bin Umar, Abdullah Bin az-Zubair and all others who opposed Yazid that they would have their say in the public meeting. Cunning that he was, he dispatched his cronies to spread the false rumor that Imam Husayn (a.s.), Abdullah bin Abbas, Abdullah Bin Umar, Abdullah Bin az-Zubair and all others who had once opposed, had consented to Yazid being nominated as the successor of Mu'awiya.

Mu'awiya made elaborate arrangement for the public gathering. He instructed his cronies to disperse to strategic points in the crowd so that they might carry out his directions at a given signal. When the meeting commenced, Mu'awiya started praising Yazid as a pious and generous person. He told the people of Medina that they had themselves witnessed Yazid's piety and generosity. When Imam Husayn (a.s.) tried to protest, Mu'awiya politely asked him to be patient and hear him fully. Mu'awiya assured, after he had finished his speech, Imam Husayn (a.s.) that he would have opportunity when his turn came to say whatever he pleased. Then, Mu'awiya proclaimed that all the nobles of Medina, including those present on the rostrum, have agreed to his nominating of Yazid as his successor. He then gave the signal to his cronies mingled in the crowd, who created a huge commotion by shouting slogans in favour of Yazid. In the confusion, nothing could be heard and a stampede was created and the gathering was forced to disperse. Imam Husayn (a.s.) and others opposed to Yazid were, thus, effectively prevented from voicing their objections, while the gathering noted their presence alongside Mu'awiya to be the sign of their approval of Yazid's succession.<sup>6</sup>

Ronald P. Sokol wrote with reference to present-day world leaders,<sup>7</sup> *"A leader not subject to law may indulge in the propensity to assign a name, be it Jew, gypsy, terrorist, enemy combatant, or insurgent, and then to demonize that name until sight is lost of the other person's humanity. When that point is reached, humiliation, torture, and death are inflicted without compunction. That propensity lies deeply embedded in the psyche. It stains democracies as well as dictatorships, presidents as well as tyrants... Law is our only tool for tempering that dark propensity."*

This analysis applies, very aptly, to Mu'awiya and his son Yazid who resorted to inventing falsehood, who threatened, bribed and set up thousands of persons to curse, defame and disparage Imam Ali (a.s.) and the *Ahlul Bayt* (a.s.) from on the pulpits five times daily after every prayer. Mu'awiya humiliated, tortured and even killed several of the companions whom the Prophet (S) had highly praised for their integrity, sincerity, religious acumen and fearlessness in the face of adversity.

Imam Ali (a.s.) was targeted to be unjustly abused, because he represented the pure, simple and unaltered Islam, as propagated by the Prophet (S). There was no room in Imam Ali's Islam for any materialist way of life or a gilded monarchy of pomp and power that was the cherished desire and practice of Mu'awiya, his ancestors and progeny. The result of Mu'awiya's action was that, except for a few right thinking persons, Imam Ali (a.s.) and all the good that he stood for, came to be clouded and the real Islam propagated by the Prophet (S) was mutilated by misinterpretations, conjectures, heresy and innovations.

Yazid followed his father Mu'awiya's footsteps with added arrogance and viciousness. He subverted the spirit of peaceful coexistence and brotherhood that Islam taught. Yazid substituted it with a constant strife for acquisition of power and territory, thereby creating chaos and mutilating beyond recognition the very sense of the word 'Islam' which means peace.

About Mu'awiya, Justice Amir Ali quotes Osborne,<sup>8</sup> *"The astute, unscrupulous and pitiless first Caliph of*

*the Umayyads shrank from no crime necessary to secure his position. Murder was his accustomed mode of removing a formidable opponent. The grandson of the Holy Prophet (S) was poisoned. Malik al-Ashtar, the heroic lieutenant of Imam Ali (a.s.), was destroyed in a like way. To secure the succession of Yazid, Mu'awiya hesitated not to break the word he pledged to Imam Hasan (a.s.), the surviving son of Ali (a.s.) ... The explanation for this anomaly is to be found in two circumstances, which I have more than once adverted. The first one is that truly devout and earnest Muslims conceived that he manifested his religion most effectively by withdrawing himself from the affairs of the world. The other is the tribal spirit of the Arabs, the conquerors of Asia, of North Africa, and of Spain. The Arabs never rose to the level of their position. Greatness had been thrust upon them. However, in the midst of their grandeur, they retained in all their previous force of intensity, the passions, the rivalries, the petty jealousies of the desert. They merely fought again on a wider field, the battles of the Arabs before Islam."*

The result of Mu'awiya's usurpation of the leadership of the Islamic world, led to terrorist methods for acquiring territory and silencing the opposition. Unfortunately, to Mu'awiya goes the credit of being the first terrorist clothed in Islamic garb as also the credit for stamping that sobriquet 'Islamic Terrorists' which is now sought to be attached to any and every Muslim.

[1.](#) Nahjul Balagha.

[2.](#) Qur'an, 6:29, 11:7, 16:38, 17:49, 17:98, 19:66, 27:67, 32:10, 44:34, 45:24.

[3.](#) Life of Husayn The Saviour, p. 71 – 72.

[4.](#) Kitabul Imamah wes-Siyasah & Kitabul Ahdath, quoted in Life of Husayn The Saviour 73.

[5.](#) Balaghatul Husayn, P. 35, Sermons, Sayings & letters of Imam Husayn (a.s.). Compiled by Mustafa Mohsin Musavi, Urdu Translation by Moulvi Sayyid Muhammad Baqir.

[6.](#) Life of Husayn, p. 95–96.

[7.](#) Ronald P. Sokol, the International Herald Tribune, the Deccan Chronicle, Hyderabad, 20 February 2005.

[8.](#) The Spirit of Islam, by Amir Ali.

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