

Chapter 30: Self Sacrificing Ladies

One should not, however, be oblivious of the fact that during the course of this everlasting and important event which took place in 61 A.H., some great and magnanimous women also participated and made sacrifices, so much so that some of them were even martyred in this path and their honorable names have been mentioned in the glorious history of the rising of Imam Husayn with honor and respect.

We now mention here the names of each of these great women in the historical order and the role played by them.

Lady Dulham: The first whose name deserves to be remembered with honor and respect was the wife of Zuhayr bin Qayn Bajali. She was the woman who acquired the most honorable position in the history of Islam for all times to come.

A man belonging to the tribe of Bani Fazara says: "We were returning from Makkah along with Zuhayr bin Qayn Bajali and were proceeding to Iraq. At that time Husayn bin Ali was also on his way to Iraq. However, we did not wish to halt at the same halting-place at which Husayn halted. Hence as and when Imam Husayn departed from a place, we halted there and when he halted at a place we moved on. However, on one occasion it so happened that we were obliged to halt at the same place at which Husayn bin Ali halted. We pitched our tents on one side and he pitched his on the other. While we were taking our meals there suddenly a messenger of the Imam came. He saluted us and said: "O Zuhayr bin Qayn! Husayn bin Ali has called you".

We disliked this message so much that we put down the morsels which we had in our hands and all of us were perplexed. However, Dulham, the daughter of Amr who was the wife of Zuhayr said to him: "The son of the Holy Prophet of Allah has sent someone to you and called you; are you not prepared to go to him? Allah be praised! What is the harm if you go and see him, hear what he has to say and then return!" The words of this woman had, the desired effect and she placed her husband in the category of the greatest martyrs of Islam. Zuhayr was impressed by the words of his wife and presented himself before the Imam. After some time he returned with a face beaming with happiness and ordered his tent to be pitched adjacent to the camp of the Holy Imam.

***Indeed, Allah is the guardian of those who believe. He takes them out of darkness into light.
(Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 257)***

Zuhayr went with the Imam and met martyrdom, and his wife returned to her relatives.

Another honor which is recorded in history about this woman has been mentioned in the book entitled Tazkira-e Sibt. According to it when Zuhayr was martyred his wife said to his slave: "Go and shroud your master". The slave came and saw the Imam without a shroud. He said to himself: "Should I shroud my master and leave the Imam without a shroud? By Allah I will do no such thing". He, therefore, shrouded the sacred body of the Imam first and then he shrouded his master.

Lady Umme Wahab: The second lady who deserves to be praised for her lofty character and sacrifice was the wife of Abdullah bin Umayr Kalbi. Abdullah bin Umayr was a resident of Kufa and belonged to the tribe of Bani Ulaym. One day he saw that a large army had gathered in the date-palm garden of 'Kufa. He enquired about the army. He was informed that those people were going to fight against Husayn, son of Fatima, the daughter of the Holy Prophet.

Abdullah said: "Allah knows that I have been keen to fight against the polytheists for His sake. However, I now hope that the spiritual reward for fighting against these people who are going to kill the grandson of the Holy Prophet will be not less than that for fighting against the polytheists. Abdullah decided to leave and informed his wife Umme Wahab, daughter of Abdullah about his intention.

His wife said: "It is an excellent idea. May Allah guide you in all circumstances. Please also take me with you". Both of them left Kufa at night and perhaps reached Karbala during the night of the 8th of Muharram. When fighting was started by the enemy in the morning of Ashura two slaves of Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad came forward for a single combat. Habib bin Mazahir Asadi and Burayr bin Khuzayr Hamdani got ready to fight with them, but the Imam asked them to wait. At this moment Abdullah bin Umayr sought the Imam's permission to fight. He faced both the enemies alone and killed them.

When the woman observed her husband fighting with them she also picked up the stick of a tent and entered the battlefield. She said to her husband: "May my parents be your ransom Sacrifice your life for the sake of the children of the Holy Prophet". The Imam said to her: "May Allah give you a good reward! May Allah bless you! Return towards the women and stay with them in the tent, because women are not required to perform jihad". Abdullah was the second person to be martyred on the day of Ashura; the first being Muslim bin Awsaja.

Lady Rubab: The third lady whose illustrious name has been recorded in the history of Ashura was Rubab, daughter of Imraul Qays, a wife of the Holy Imam. She was the only wife of the Imam who accompanied him during his journey to Karbala.

As regards Shehr Banu, the daughter of Yazd Gard, the last King of Persia and the mother of the fourth Imam, she had died about 24 years earlier than the tragedy of Karbala.

The name of Layla, daughter of Abi Murrâh bin Urwah bin Mas'ud Thaqafi the mother of Ali Akbar, has also not been mentioned in connection with this tragedy and it is not known whether or not she was alive at that time. No mention has also been made of the mother of Ja'far bin Husayn, who belonged to the tribe of Quza'a. There is also no mention in the event of Ashura of the mother of Fatima, daughter of Husayn i.e. Umme Ishaq daughter of Talha bin Ubaydullah Taymi. Her daughter Fatima was, however, present in Karbala. She also went to Kufa and Syria.

The Imam's only wife who was with him during this journey was, therefore, the said honorable lady viz. Rubab, daughter of Imraul Qays Kalbi. Imraul Qays was a Christian.

During the period of the Caliphate of Umar he embraced Islam. From the very first day the caliph made him the chief of the tribe of Quza'a. Besides the honor of becoming a Muslim and an Islamic chief he also acquired another distinction. He had three daughters and he gave one of them in marriage to Ali, the second to Hasan and the youngest namely Rubab to Imam Husayn. Thus he became the father-in-law of three Imams.

Lady Rubab had one daughter and one son from Imam Husayn who were named Sukayna and Abdullah respectively. The son who was a suckling was killed on the day of Ashura and she herself as well as her daughter Sukayna were made prisoners. The name of this lady, however, has not been mentioned in connection with the events of the day of Ashura.

The fourth lady whose name may be mentioned in connection with the events of the afternoon of the day of Ashura belonged to the tribe of Bakr bin Wa'il. She enjoys an eminent position in depicting the tragedy of Karbala. She has recorded on the pages of history a precise picture of the meanness of the enemy in a few words.

She was with her husband in the army of Ibn sad. However, when she saw that the soldiers of Kufa had made a rush on the tents of the children of Imam Husayn and were looting even the dresses of the ladies she picked up a sword, proceeded towards the tents of Imam Husayn and shouted: "O children of Bakr bin Wa'il! You are alive and in spite of this these people are plundering the tents of the daughters of the Holy Prophet. Allah is the only Arbitrator. Come on, and avenge the bloodshed". By means of these brief words she showed to what extent the enemy had become mean. It seems as if the cry of this lady is still resounding at the doors of the tents of Imam Husayn.

While studying the history of Ashura we come across the names of many magnanimous women who rose to support truth and the godly persons with perfect sincerity and they are not the only four women mentioned above. However, just as none of the martyrs, whether Hashimite or non-Hashimite, in spite of their greatness, magnanimity and self-sacrifice, can attain to the position of Imam Husayn, who was the leader of this revolution, none of these great women who displayed an eminent performance at the time of the martyrdom of the martyrs or during captivity, could acquire a position equal to that of lady Zaynab, the eldest daughter of Imam Ali.

It was she who could truly take the place of her brother during captivity and followed the same movement from the afternoon of the day of Ashura till her arrival in Madina. She truly followed what her brother said: "Abjection and humiliation are far removed from us, the Ahlul Bayt". She thus discharged the responsibility devolved upon her. We may say that it was due to the education given to her by her mother, Lady Fatima Zahra. She ought to have been as patient in the path of faith as her mother Fatima and her grandmother Khadija had been.

Was it not lady Khadija who was the first to believe in the Prophet hood of the Prophet of Allah, and who made greater sacrifices than anyone else for the advancement of his religion and supported him in all difficulties and hardships for about ten years i.e. from the first year of his prophetic mission till the tenth year when she died?

Was lady Zaynab not the grand-daughter of the same lady Khadija and was the path pursued by Imam Husayn any other path than the advancement of religion and the revival of the call of the Holy Prophet? Hence, in case it was necessary that, for the sake of the true religion of Islam and for the Holy Qur'an, women should become captives and as a consequence of this should address the people in the bazaars and the streets so as to nullify the unjustified propaganda of the enemy and to make the reality known to the people, who could be more suited for this task than the daughter of Imam Ali who had inherited self-sacrifice from Khadija, the greatest self-sacrificing lady of Islam, and Imam Ali the greatest supporter of the Prophet of Allah.

Lady Zaynab, who was the daughter of Ali ibn Abi Talib and also the grand-daughter of Khadija addressed the people in the bazaar of Kufa and spoke eloquently like her father. It might be said that she was speaking with the tongue of Imam Ali. By making a sign to the people she made them quiet as if they had ceased to breathe, and suppressed the tumult.

Ahmad bin Tahir Baghdadi (d. 280 A.H.) has given three versions of her address in his book entitled *Balaghatun Nisa*, one of which is reported to have come down from Imam Sadiq.

Umme Kulsum, the sister of Zaynab also addressed the people in the bazaar of Kufa. Both the sisters severely reproached the Kufians who were touched so much that they began to weep and lament.

Fatima, the daughter of Imam Husayn also addressed the people in the bazaar of Kufa and invited their attention to the great sin which they had committed and the bad luck and adversity in which they had involved themselves.

The task of Ahlul Bayt in the bazaar of Kufa came to an end, and then they got an opportunity to speak in the court of Ibn Ziyad. The daughter of Imam Ali came in the court in a very simple dress. She was encircled by her slave-girls. She went and sat down in a corner of the palace. Ibn Ziyad asked: "Who is the woman who has gone and sat down in a corner along with her slave-girls?" None gave him a reply. He then repeated his question. Thereupon one of the slave-girls of lady Zaynab said: "It is Zaynab and she is the daughter of the same Fatima who was the daughter of the Prophet of Allah".

At this moment a heavy responsibility devolved upon Zaynab. It was necessary that she should exercise self-control. She should also give a reply to Ibn Ziyad and should not give him a chance to let the matter be ambiguous in the eyes of the people.

Ibn Ziyad said: "I thank Allah that He has disgraced you and killed you and made the people aware of your fresh lies". Ibn Ziyad uttered three blasphemous words on account of his being arrogant of his victory. Otherwise what fresh lie had Bani Hashim told? Was it a fresh lie on their part that they said, "Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah", or did they tell any other lie?

In any case lady Zaynab said immediately in reply to Ibn Ziyad: "Allah be thanked that He has honored us by means of His Prophet Muhammad and purified us of every impurity. You have said that we have been disgraced but it is a libertine who is disgraced and you have said that we have lied but lies are told by the wicked. And I thank Allah once again that others, and not we, are the libertines and the wicked".

In spite of this prompt reply by the daughter of Imam Ali Ibn Ziyad said again: "Have you seen what Allah has done with your family?" It appears that by saying this Ibn Ziyad wanted to remind her of those who had been martyred two days earlier so that she might be moved and possibly say something according to his wishes or make some requests. He was, however, oblivious of the fact that the Ahlul Bayt did everything very intelligently and did not utter even a word which was not worthy of their position, and whatever they said was well calculated and according to a plan, so that the object which they had in view might be achieved.

In reply to Ibn Ziyad's question: "Have you seen what Allah has done with your family?" Zaynab replied: "Nothing new has happened. These martyrs of our family were persons for whom Allah had destined martyrdom, and they achieved this blessing, and embraced martyrdom. However, a day will come soon when Allah will summon you and them for the settlement of accounts and there you will grapple and dispute with each other".

On hearing this Ibn Ziyad was so much disturbed and annoyed that if Amr bin Harith had not reproached him, it was possible that he might have ordered the sister of the Imam to be killed. However, of what use could it be to him? Zaynab had already said what she had to say. She had also identified the libertines and the wicked and introduced the pure and sacred family of the Holy Prophet.

After a month or a few days more had passed, the daughter of Imam Ali arrived in a more important and more delicate assembly. Here also it was her duty to speak more clearly. As compared with the Kufians the Syrians were more mistaken and more unacquainted with the Ahlul Bayt. It was, therefore, necessary that she should mention the reality and introduce the Ahlul Bayt more emphatically.

This assembly was organized in Damascus, the Islamic capital. Here, too, lady Zaynab addressed the people and spoke to them. This speech has also been mentioned by Ahmad bin Tahir Baghdadi in *Balaghatun Nisa*. He says: "When Yazid saw the prisoners belonging to Ahlul Bayt and found them standing before him he ordered the head of Imam Husayn to be brought in a tray.

He hit the teeth of Imam Husayn with a stick which he had in his hand and recited some poetic verses which are summarized thus: "I wish that my ancestors, who were killed in Badr, had been alive today so that they might see the present condition of the descendants of Muhammad and had rejoiced and said: 'O Yazid! May your hands never ache". He added: "May I not be a descendant of my ancestors if I don't take revenge upon the children of Muhammad".

When the matters took such a turn, and Yazid, who killed Imam Husayn, now rose to oppose and take revenge upon the Holy Prophet. Was then lady Zaynab justified in ignoring his words and deeds and in keeping quiet before one who claimed to be the successor of the Holy Prophet and ruled in that capacity, and killed the most pious persons of Islam avenging the murder of the polytheists of Makkah, who were killed by the Prophet in the Battle of Badr? Could she remain silent when she saw that the Syrians had accepted the words of Yazid as true and believed them?

Evidently Lady Zaynab could not keep quiet at this stage. Whatever she said was her duty that she performed. Allah also preserved her speech and it was not eliminated like many other religious documents. We should be thankful to the Almighty Allah for this blessing.

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