

Chapter 3: On the Acmes of Glory

The remembrance of glory and Jihad epics are mainly considered as a bright era in the life of Al-Khonsari, the struggler. During the foreign invasion followed the First World War, Al-Khonsari was the first figure to comfort and defy it.

Iraq, the Home of Sacred Places

Peace be upon the holy land, Iraq, peace be upon Noah, and upon the place where his ark anchored soon after the Flood.

Peace be upon Ali, upon his footmarks in his land.

His niche in Kufa is still stained with his pure blond. Peace be upon the land that had witnessed the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s.), where his tears and guiltless blood were shed.

Peace be upon the land which was present at the scene of capturing Imam Sajjad (a.s.), handcuffed and fettered.

Peace be upon the land which guarded the estrangement of Imam Al-Khadhim(a.s.) and his darksome and murky dungeon, and the broken hearts of his jailors.

Peace be upon the land that watched Imam Al-Jawad (a.s.) while “Allah was giving him judgment, yet a little child”... the Imam who became in charge of Imamate, and the world was wholly perplexed and bewildered for his knowledge and strong faith.

Peace be upon the land that has observed the outbreak of the impoverished and oppressed authority...the land that cuddles the steps of Imam Al-Imam Al-Muntadhar (may Allah hasten his glad advent) and touches His blessed feet.

The Shi'a in Iraq

Iraq, and before the initiation of the first world war, for a long time, was an open field that had witnessed bitter fierce skirmishes and combats between the Safavid and Ottoman empires.

Baghdad and for many times was temporarily occupied by the two power during an instable period filled with severe wars as a distinctive feature of it, until Sulaiman Qanooni could laid hold of the whole Iraq, and was annexed to the Ottoman Empire once and for all.

The majority of the people seem to be Shi'ite dwelling the southern part of the ancient country. Owing to political reasons concerned with the cultural basis, the Ottoman empire adopted the Hanafite doctrines.

Consequently, many of the Ottoman rulers (Sultans) have rudely treated the Shi'ites and the Ja'afari sect in particular, by expropriating most of their properties, as the Ottoman policy aimed to turckicize the conquered country and popularizing the Hanafite sect all over the land.

Due to their being unfamiliar with the Arabic language, sundry Ottoman rulers in Iraq were in most cases depending on some Shi'ite viziers to coin the Arabic phrases of governmental declarations, whereas the same vizier keeps his position as "minister without portfolio".

The mentioned policy was to be said as so unfair with the Shi'ites, that lots of the well qualified of them were driven away from any administrative or parliamentary post in the government. Yet they were appointing an Iraqi Sunni representative for the Shi'ite regions, such as Karbala, Amarah or any others.

Contrarily, the Jews and the Christians were enjoying their rights as well as they have got a representative in the so-called "The House of Mab'oothan".¹

Though the issuance of the 1908 Ottoman constitution which has been considered as a real revolution and public call to freedom and equality between the whole citizens, without exception, nevertheless, the Shi'ites suffered deprivation of their rights as to select their own representative for their own cities.

Kamil Al-Chadurchi expresses the Ottomans' oppression of the Shi'ites, saying:

*"The Shi'ites were being regarded, by the rulers, as a minority, especially during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hameed. Thus they were generally prevented from being progressed in any vital field. One of the noticeable instances of that policy: The government refused to accept any Shi'ite student who applies for the military academy, and Shi'ites were rarely given a government post, except in case of dire need. Yet many slight obstacles presented by the government to hinder the Shi'ites from entering even the high schools on the plea that they are only Shi'ites."*²

Inferentially, public dissatisfaction among the Shi'ites with that abominable sectarian discrimination cropped up, the fact which increased the feeling to liberate from the Turkish yoke, waiting for an opportunity for revolting against the inequity and tyranny³

The First World War

The economical and political competition among the European countries to seize greater power was the main reason to blow up the First World War, which drew the whole world onto the edge of definite destruction.

The wars broke out between the Axis (Germany, Italy and Austria) and the Allies (Great Britain, France, Russia and Japan) while the Ottoman Empire fought with the Axis, largely due to the close relation with Germany.

The immediate advance of the German – through the Russian front – compelled the Allies to open a new front in Iran aiming to stop the German's march on the one hand, and to diminish the pressure in the Russian front on the other hand.

The Ottomans moved quickly to discontinue the British advance in Iran, and fierce battles occurred between the contributing panics, for the reason of that, the Allies were forced to open another front in Iraq to reduce the Ottoman pressure and cut the reaching of the reinforcements besides, to control the oil wells, which is concerned as the most serious and vital matter to continue the military machine.

Consequently, the Fao fortress was occupied by the British forces, then they continued their advance towards the north.

The Shi'ite Attitude

In fact, the situation was too embarrassing and highly sensitive, since little hopes appeared saying that may be the British armies would be the only way to end the Ottoman domination of the country. The Shi'ites were suffering dual feel, either to support the (Allies), and thus they have their own political and juristic reasons specifically the British campaign held the “Liberation” motto the “Occupation” one.

Nonetheless, Shi'ite were in a position remain neutral, avoiding being involved in the current clash since they were not related with the office of mufti in Istanbul, and yet the Ja'afari sect has not been declared as a legal one by the government. In addition to that, a rule which refers that they have to prefer a just non-Muslim to an oppressive Muslim admits them to accept such siding with the Allies.

Anyhow, the Iraqi Shi'ites adopted a splendid attitude completely opposite to that which has been taken up by Sunni followers on standing by the British occupation.

A fatwa for Jihad (Holy War) against occupation and then issued by the late great Marji' (source of imitation) Aytullah Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim Al-Yazdi, and his son was delegated to contribute to the military operation.

Another fatwa for Jihad has been distributed by Ayatullah Mirza Muhammad Taqi Al-Shirazi, sending his

elder son too.

Many other fatwas for sharing Jihad were issued by many remarkable Mujtahids, and thus noticeable number of people embarked on the fronts to fight the occupier. Among those people were Ayatullah Sayyid Mustafa Al-Kashani with his son Sayyid Abul Qasim, Ayatullah Sheikh Sharia' Al-Isfahani, Ayatullah Ali Damad, Ayatullah Mehdi Al-Haydari, Ayatullah Sa'eed Al-Habboobi, Ayatullah Al-Khalisi, and Sayyid (Muhsin Al-Hakeem).

While the *Mashyakhatul Islam* (religious chief of the Muslims), the legal representative of Turkish Mashyakha in Baghdad, drew the line at criticizing the occupier, and instead it went for the new ruler and its aspects were clearly shown in many meetings.

Towards Jihad

Those days were of Muharram (1st, lunar month)...the days related to Imam Husayn (a.s.), the hero of the freedom, the 'Ulamas' fatwa were increasingly escalating and arousing enthusiasm and zealously for holding back the aggression.

Al-Khonsari, like others, a Husayni spirit named inside him with jealousy, so he left out of study and headed for the world of struggle and resistance, loaded up with a rifle and some bullets, and was a man of proud, brave warrior men.

Al-Khonsari and some other Mujahids (strivers) were a group that was led by Ayatullah Mustafa Al-Kashani. The combatants' boat flowed on the water of the Tigris and the Euphrates moving towards the confluence of the two rivers, where the city of Basrah is situated.

The Clashes' Fronts

It is said that in some fronts the number of Mujahids were exceeding the soldiers of the Ottoman regular army, once in a while. For instance, the Islamic forces centred in Shu'aibah consisted of 7600 Turkish warriors, during the time that the Arab Mujahids were more than 18000. The Mujahids who were in Qurnah estimated to be around forty thousand, distributed among three fronts:

The heart centred in Qurnah, led by the 'Alims: Mehdi Al-Haydari, Sheikhul Shari'a Al-Isfahani, Ayatullah Mustafa Al-Kashani, Ali Al-Damad and Abdul Razzaq Al-Hiloo.

The right flank: centred in Shu'aibah ...led by the 'Alims: Muhammad Sa'eed Al-Habboobi, Baqir Haydar and Muhsin Al-Hakeem.

The left flank: centred in Huwayzah led by the 'Alims: Mehdi Al-Khalisi (with his son Muhammad) Ja'afar Al-Sheikh Radhi, Abdul Kareem Al-Jaza-iri, and Isa Kamalul Din.

Worth mentioning, Mujtahids have exploited guerrilla warfare in addition to the traditional fighting against the British military camps, purposed appropriating ammunition, besides inflicting huge loss on the enemy, and then retreat aback again.

Cheerful Laughter

They were three persons: Sayyid Abul Qasim Al-Kashani, Al-Khonsari and Sayyid Muhammad Ridha Al-Bakhtiyari, gathered by Jihad relationship, Jihad against an overseas enemy...who has come to confiscate the Islamic lands, to humble man's pride.

Life always exposes the essence of men, and the war itself is a bitter experiment puts the humane self to the test, distinguishes one from the other.

In other words, it draws closely the features of personality. The fortress was under the British mortars fire, and the ground was same as a bell, violent explosions....splintering things to pieces...there were bombs, fires...

An atmosphere of horror filled that place, but Al-Khonsari was laughing cheerfully...

The late Al-Bakhtiyari (Al-Khonsari's comrade) relates:

“We were inside the trench, and Sayyid (i.e. Al-Khonsari) seemed very happy and was laughing all the time. His comrades became astonished. Sayyid spreaded a sphere filled with security while those moments were indeed crucial and decisive”.

In Central Mesopotamia

Sayyid Muhammad Taqi was in the front lines of the troops, cocking his gun towards the enemy and firing them angrily. Meanwhile, the British warplanes were flying over the Mujahids and streams of lava pouring everywhere, shaking the ground under them, and the Mujahids were being besieged badly, thus the British proved their progressive power. In the same time that was an enough reason to weaken the Mujahids' morale.

Soon the sign of defeat were about to appear among the Mujahids. Yet Mujahids were being much heartened by Al Kashani and his comrade in Jihad (Al-Khonsari) calling to continue the resistance, saying:

“Running away during the fight is a great sin”.

The siege becomes restrictive, and the resistances become severer. Martyrs were falling here and there, but the epic of championship still goes on, and Al-Khonsari has nothing to think about but “one of the two rewards most fair” victory of martyrdom.

Death comes unto the Mujahids from every side. Here, Al-Khonsari turns his face to his fellows saying:

“Now, since death is surrounding us, it is better to perform ablution and pray the last prayers for Allah...”

Victory or Defeat

The British troops, by the leadership of Major-General Townsend, were besieged in Kut for five months, then surrendered to the Ottoman forces after suffering heavy losses with a nearly estimate of four thousand killed, the most of which were English, and about 12000 English and Hindu captives.

This bitter defeat forced the Allies to change their armies' direction to Mount Himrin. The battles lasted about 18months...while the enemy troops were marking time in the southern parts.

Jihad fatwas and the presence of 'Ulama at the battle fields have considerably increased inflaming the fighting spirit inside the Iraqi people, but the corruptible Ottoman government policy and the Turkish racial discrimination, along with oppressive behaviour towards Shia and exhausting their potential energy...all that led the allies to proceed ahead through other fronts, which ended by the occupation of Baghdad, while the whole southern parts of Iraq remained in complete resistance.

The End of Jihad

The synchronous defeat of Baghdad at the same time of other victories gained by the Allies, was a clear announcement of Jihad being ended. So, the popular troops dispersed, resistance and defence barricades were completely empty, and the new actual ruler, the Allies, began to chase after those who have taken part in resistance. Thus a vast campaign to arrest the participators has begun.

An augmenting activity for the spies employed by Great Britain commenced to find the Mujahids and submit them to the authority. Thus, Ayatullah Al-Khonsari who was wounded in his leg, was arrested and then driven to the occupation prisons.

All attempts served to set him free became unsuccessful, since the British policy showed its frank and obvious wrath against the non-Arabs Mujahids stubbornly.

Port Basrah

Much liberation have been arrested and conveyed to Basrah by the British pending one of their ships to carry them away in one of the British easternmost colonies of Asia.

The ship was intending to go towards Singapore, one of the British colonies in Indo-China. Al-Khonsari, finally found himself on a strange ship accompanied with many other captives. The large multitude of the captives on that ship obliged its English captain to permit the captives to lie down on the deck of the ship. Sailing the blue waves of the Gulf, the ship disappeared behind the horizon.

The calm sea added a particular tranquillity upon everyone, and the ship which was quivering quietly, seemed to have the characteristic of a mother that is rocking her baby to sleep in its cradle.

The men tightened their eyes on the far horizon, where there was nothing but dumb darkness. The ship was directing to a known target...but unknown to the captives. Days and nights were passing while the ship still cutting its way through the water, through the Journey of Torture. Oppression and Ties...

As soon as the ship entered the equatorial waters, Al-Khonsari felt that his journey was exceedingly resembling that of Imam Sajjad (a.s.) in the caravan of Karbala, since the only consolation and comfort is patience and praying.

At Singapore

Now after four months voyage, the ship arrived the Singaporean coasts and the eyes that haven't seen the land all that time, are now looking at a land called Singapore, where the ships were brought into the attractive harbour and dropped the anchor near the dense Jungles or Singapore filled with wild beasts and dangerous snakes.

Singapore is a peninsula almost covered with evergreens trees, situated in the way of the international routs...This peninsula has been bought very low by an Englishman, and gave it a present to the British Crown ,and then it became a very important navigable port in the Far East.

The captives and in spite of the unknown destiny waiting for them, seemed to be very happy. They became weary and sick of *mal de mer*, of solicitude and of sleeplessness. They were about four hundred, and were brought down to this distant land in order to be sure that they will not even think about escape.

Thus, Mujahids have been conveyed to a cam in the middle of a desert (inhabited only by the Koka who were known as cannibal tribes) encircled by barbed wire. Therefore, the camp guards were counting the captives and the missing were to be regarded as a certain meal for the Koka.

The Exchange of Culture

Conditions were unbearable anymore, since the prison and estrangement were more merciless than executioners' faces. So, one must open hope hole towards the new environment, relieving the monotony of everyday life.

In the meantime, Ayatullah Al-Khonsari became acquainted with an Indian maharaja who spoke Persian very well, and a series of conversations occurred between both of them, so the maharaja suggested teaching Al-Khonsari the English language, and Al-Khonsori teaches him logic and philosophy in return for that.

An Attitude

One day Ayatullah Al-Khonsari has been invited to the bureau of the concentration camp officer who realised his scientific rank, especially now, when he could also speak English fluently, a feature which can be utilized in various directions. So, the officer proposed that Al-Khonsari translates a book into the Persian language.

Therefore, Al-Khonsari devoted himself to study the book and thus he was fully acquainted with its contents and aims, reaching the point that this book is a misleading one, and to translate it means laying the foundation of colonization and imperialism in the Indian subcontinent.

Al-Khonsari believed that a man may commit a sin in one of his life periods which is the nature and the instinct of the human beings, but with little suffering and patience the human self may be elevated and becomes purer.

Thus, the devil couldn't overcome Al-Khonsari's clean and spotless soul to co-operate with the religion and humanity enemies. So, he insistently refused to translate that book, answering the call of his stainless principles and immaculate doctrines. This refusal was conveyed to the officer who then threatened to punish him and hence behave severely with every captive, especially him.

But as much as it is concerned with Al-Khonsari, he paid no simple attention to the officer's speech that was filled with menace, since he got Husayni and 'Ashoora firebrand inside him.

The authority then confined his movement more and more, using starvation and other means, but Al-Khonsari's body was becoming thinner day after another, while his faith and morale remained like the deep rooted cedar, unbeatable and ever-living.

The Calm Heart

It seems that the prison and estrangement have, to some extent, offered Al-Khonsari a unique opportunity to dive into the thoughts and contemplation.

The environment has its own effective influence on the creatures that live inside it, who at last have no other way but to response to that environment. The life inside the prisons that are surrounded with barbed wire, the sight of the desolate desert, besides the bitter cruel circumstances there, all those factors were able to change the prisoners into rapacious wolves.

Yet it is indeed a surprising matter to notice that a man can keep his balance even in this arduous time.

Al-Khonsari has really astonished the jailors with his good manners and stability.

One of the jailers aimed to entertain himself by torturing Al-Khonsari by losing a wild animal which has

recently entrapped in order to hurt him. As Al-Khonsari himself relates:

“One day when everyone went out and I remained inside the prison alone, I saw the jailor setting a wild animal free towards me. The animal jumped into me, but when I stayed unmoved it retreated against towards the door. Then it repeated that once more, without harming me at all.”

The Liberty

The maharaja who was set free from the prison, didn't forget his close friend Al-Khonsari, so he struggled so much to liberate him in spite of all difficulties, since he was quite aware of the English malice against Al-Khonsari, but he knows too the way to lose him from this wicked place.

Money will guarantee his freedom and open the locked doors.

That's what happened, when maharaja paid a lot of gold coins to the camp officer when played his role and signed a small paper which immediately set Al-Khonsari free.

Thus, Al-Khonsari found himself free after four years of capture, torture and vanquishing.

Al-Khonsari embraced his friend maharaja warmly, thanking him and appreciating his great deed, and both friends were shedding hot tears during the time of farewell.

Al-Khonsari was already aboard the ship, cutting its way through the water towards the lovely homeland.

1. The Ottoman Parliament.

2. Al-Shi'a Wal Dawlah Al-Qawmiyyah, from the documents of Kamil Al-Chadurchi, p.86.

3. There were many battles occupied between the Ottoman and Shi'ite Arab tribes e.g. Al-Mun tafak, Al-Fatlah, Al-Gharraf, Al-Khaza'il. The battle of Al-Najaf and Turks on 1915 was the last of those battles. See: Al-Shi'a Wal Dawlah Al-Qawmiyyah, p.57.

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