

Chapter 45: Authorities on the Event of Karbala

The event of the tragedy of Karbala is nearing completion. It however seems desirable to mention some important authorities and authentic references which have not been stated up till now.

One of those valuable authorities is the sermon which Imam Sajjad, the fourth Imam delivered in Damascus, the capital of the Islamic caliphate, in the year 61 A.H. He acquired a very suitable opportunity, which he availed of in the most sublime manner.

Indeed, it may be said that the best opportunity which Imam Sajjad got during his journey as a captive was on the day when the official preacher of the caliph mounted the pulpit and began to vilify Imam Ali and his children and to praise Mu'awiya and his children. Of course, this stage was designed by Yazid himself. It was he who ordered a preacher to mount the pulpit and inform the people of Syria about the evil deeds (God forbid!) of Imam Husayn and his father, Imam Ali. This drama, like many other dramas in history, was also staged against truth and the truthful people. Those who staged it did not, however, realize that truth can utilize every development to its own advantage and every plan which is chalked out to destroy it increases its strength.

Imam Sajjad's addressing the people in these cities was especially necessary because from the day on which the city of Damascus was conquered till the day on which the Ahlul Bayt who had been made captives arrived there (i.e. for about 46 years) it had been continuously under the influence of Bani Umayya and the Islamic Government there was administered by the Umayyads who had been old enemies of Ahlul Bayt (the progeny of the Holy Prophet) during the Age of Ignorance as well as after their embracing Islam. In 13 A.H., four days before the death of Abu Bakr, the Muslim mujahids besieged Damascus under the command of Khalid bin Walid.

When Abu Bakr died and Umar succeeded him as caliph he removed Khalid from the Commandership and Abu Ubayda took his place. The Muslims continued the siege of Damascus for one year and a few days and were able to conquer it in the month of Rajab of 14 A.H. For some time Yazid bin Abu Sufyan was the Governor of Damascus and when he died of plague in 17 A.H. Umar appointed his brother Mu'awiya in his place. Mu'awiya held this office from 17 A.H. till the beginning of the Caliphate of Imam Ali in 35 A.H.

During the time of the Caliphate of Imam Ali and Imam Hasan, which lasted for about five years, Mu'awiya held Syria under his control and Damascus remained the base of enmity against Ahlul Bayt. After Imam Hasan renounced the caliphate in 41 A.H. this city became the capital of the caliphate and Islamic Government and till 61 A.H. i.e. for about twenty years was more than ever a center of hostility against Bani Hashim and especially against Imam Ali.

In 61 A.H. Imam Sajjad arrived in this city and got an opportunity to address its inhabitants and to unveil the realities which had remained hidden from them for a period of forty–six years. Of course, Imam Sajjad did not get this opportunity to address the people easily and had to face numerous difficulties and inconveniences to acquire it, but even then it was something very valuable.

What could be better than that Imam Sajjad, the grandson of Imam Ali and the son of Imam Husayn, should have come to Damascus on the insistence of the caliph himself, where he mounted the pulpit which had been set for vilifying his honorable ancestors, set at naught the forty–six year old propaganda of Bani Umayya and enlightened with one speech those people, who had been ignorant of truth for years. In this way thpir hostility against Ahlul Bayt immediately converted into friendship and they became acquainted with the sacred names that they had seldom heard before.

We think that till that time most of the people of Syria did not know that the Doyen of the Martyrs was Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib or that the Holy Prophet had said about Imam Hasan and Husayn that they were the chiefs of the young men of Paradise. It cannot, therefore, be imagined that if Imam Sajjad and his aunt lady Zaynab had not got such an opportunity or had not availed of one which had been bestowed upon them by Allah it would have been possible for anyone till the end of the, caliphate of Bani Umayya in 132 A.H. to utter a word, in the unfavorable atmosphere of Damascus, about the magnanimity and greatness of the persons belonging to Ahlul Bayt or to introduce them as the honorable personalities of Islam.

After these speeches, however, the position became such that although during the period of 1000 month rule of Bani Umayya, Bani Hashim and Ahlul Bayt and the followers of Imam Ali were tormented and persecuted, the effect of these speeches also remained firm and established. In fact, the efforts of the distinguished companion, Abuzar Ghifari, had already created a favorable atmosphere for the success of these speeches and with the arrival of Ahlul Bayt in Syria and with what the people of Damascus heard from them, the memory of Abuzar, who had firmly and openly opposed the deviations of Mu'awiya, was revived. (Refer to Abuzar Ghifari, ISP, 1984)

Abuzar was a very out–spoken, religious and brave person and as soon as he realized that the Islamic Caliphate had deviated from its proper course he opposed and criticized it in the presence of the caliph as well as in the streets and the bazaars. He may be considered to be the founder of such Islamic risings and movements, because he was a companion of the Holy Prophet and enjoyed precedence over others in the chronological order. Of course, Abuzar was exiled, suffered hardships and died in Rabaza in a state of helplessness, but in spite of all this he never sat still and continued to invite the

people to good and to restrain them from evil.

After Mu'awiya came in power some other persons continued the task of Abuzar. Abuzar departed from the world but Hujr bin Ady Kindi took his place and said what ought to have been said. He opposed with great boldness the regime which had declared in the name of Islam the vilification of Imam Ali to be a religious duty and even a condition for the acceptance of worship, and laid down his life in pursuance of this task. Hujr did not reach Damascus and was killed at Marj Uzra, a place situated near that city, but even there he continued to say what he had to say and to defend Imam Ali's right.

However, the words of Abuzar and Hujr bin Ady and his friends could not constitute a sufficient reply to the unjust propaganda of the Umayyad dynasty and caliphate which extended over a period of more than forty years. It was, therefore, necessary that persons belonging to Ahlul Bayt should have met the people of this city themselves and removed their misunderstanding.

They should have furnished a living proof of the services rendered by the distinguished members of the family of Bani Hashim to Islam and the Muslims of the world and also made public the shameful past of Bani Umayya consisting of enmity with the Prophet of Allah and the Muslims. It was for this reason that Imam Sajjad considered the availability of the pulpit and an assembly to be something very valuable and joined that assembly notwithstanding the fact that it had been arranged to vilify Imam Husayn and his father Imam Ali.

The preacher appointed by Mu'awiya mounted the pulpit and praised Allah. Then he abused Imam Ali and Imam Husayn and at the same time praised Mu'awiya and Yazid lavishly and associated every good with them as if these father and son were the fountain-head of all noble acts and good morals and whatever the people possessed had been given to them by the descendants of Abu Sufyan. They had to depend on them for their prosperity in this world and in the Hereafter and the only source to gain Divine pleasure was to obey and follow them.

It was on this occasion that Imam Sajjad said loudly without any fear or apprehension: "Woe be to you O speaker! Why in order to please the people are you courting Allah's wrath? You should know that your destination is Hell".

The remark of the Imam was aimed at the preacher of Damascus who annoyed Allah to please Yazid and thus chose the path to Hell, but actually it contains advice for every speaker and warns him against things which displease Allah and please His creatures. All the Muslim speakers have thus been instructed to keep in view only the Divine pleasure in whatever they say, and should communicate Allah's message to the people without any addition or distortion. They should not say anything which displeases Allah so as to please people and should have firm faith in what Allah has said in this regard in the Holy Qur'an:

Certainly We created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him. We are closer to him than his jugular vein. Since the two scribes are placed on each of his shoulders, man does not

utter a word which is not recorded immediately by the watchful scribes. (Surah Qaf, 50: 16 - 18)

These are the words of Allah which find their place in the Holy Qur'an. Imam Sajjad was also inviting the attention of the ignorant preacher to this very thing and warning him that every good or bad act of man is recorded and one should not ignore the wrath of Allah to please one of His creatures and should not forget that a day will come when the persons whom he considered powerful will not be able to do anything for him.

After reproaching the caliph's preacher and admonishing him for his extravagant talk, Imam Sajjad (Zaynul Abidin) turned to Yazid and said: "Do you permit me as well to ascend these pieces of wood and say something which may please Allah and become a means of spiritual reward for the listeners?"

A very fascinating wit is hidden in these few words of Imam Sajjad and it might be said that he summarized in a few words what he wanted to say. Firstly he did not seek permission to ascend the pulpit but the piece of wood. He meant to say that everything which is given the shape of a pulpit and someone mounts and delivers a speech from there, cannot be called a pulpit. On the contrary these pieces of wood are a means to destroy the pulpits.

Anybody who assumes the guise of a preacher cannot be called the promoter and preacher of religion. He also meant to say that the preacher who had delivered the speech had sold his faith for the sake of worldly gains and had agreed to please the people and to displease Allah and his destination was, therefore, Hell.

Then Imam Sajjad said: "I want to say things which may please Allah". He meant to say that what the preacher was saying was the cause of inviting Divine wrath and it was not possible to earn Allah's pleasure by abusing a man like Imam Ali and by praising a man like Yazid. He himself, therefore, wanted to say things through which the listeners might earn spiritual reward i.e. what the preacher was saying could not produce any result other than sinfulness and adversity for the people and their deviating from the right path.

The people insisted that Yazid should permit the Imam to speak but he declined vehemently to do so and said at last "These are people brought up in the atmosphere of knowledge and wisdom and if I allow him to speak he will put me to shame". However, insistence of the people prevailed and Imam Sajjad mounted the pulpit. He spoke in such a way that the people were moved and began to weep and cry.

The son of Imam Husayn indicated the position of Ahlul Bayt in the Islamic society and made their merits and virtues known to the people. He also put forward a logical verdict which is accepted by all wise men. He said:

"Whoever wishes to lead and 'guide the people must be superior to them and be chosen for their leadership on account of that very superiority. The Holy Qur'an says about this very logical verdict: Is one who guides to the truth a proper guide or one who himself cannot find guidance

unless he is guided? What is wrong with you that you judge so unjustly? (Surah Yunus, 10:36)

This verse is not used as an argument, rather the attention of the people has been invited to the very logical verdict that only that person who is more knowledgeable, can guide the people and not others, and whoever himself needs guidance cannot guide others.

Although the polytheists of Makkah did not believe in the prophethood of the Holy Prophet of Allah, they accepted the logical verdict that if a prophet was to be appointed by Allah a great man of the nation should have been chosen for this task. They were, however, mistaken about the means of greatness and source of superiority and thought that greatness depended on a large amount of wealth or many sons and kinsmen or power.

They, therefore, used to say: "If Allah desired to send a prophet for us, the people of the Hijaz, why did he not appoint to this office the great man of Makkah i.e. Walid bin Mughira Makhzumi or the great man of Taif i.e. Urwa bin Masud Thaqafi?" The Holy Qur'an says:

They say why this Qur'an had not been revealed to a great man from either of the two towns. (Surah Zukhruf, 43:32)

The polytheists of Makkah were correct in saying that the Divine Book should have been revealed to one of the great men of the Hijaz. They were, however, mistaken in attributing the quality of greatness to Walid or Urwa. This was so because they treated wealth and material power and distinction to be the criterion of greatness and superiority but did not attach any importance to knowledge, good morals and other human virtues. They could not, therefore, believe that the great man of not only the Hijaz but of the entire world was Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah and not Walid or Urwah.

In his sermon Imam Sajjad mentioned the merits by which an individual could excel another individual and a nation could become superior to another nation. He also made it clear that the Holy family of the Prophet enjoyed superiority over others and others are not of the same rank, because Allah has made them superior to others and chosen them for the guidance and training of the Muslims.

Imam Sajjad said explicitly and with great boldness: "O people! Allah has given us six things and our superiority over others rests on seven pillars. We have been given knowledge which is the basic condition for the superiority of an individual over an individual or of a nation over a nation. We have been given forbearance which is very important for the reformation and guidance of the people. Generosity which is useful for the Islamic rulers is our habit.

Eloquence which is extremely necessary for the guidance of the people and enjoining them to do good and restraining them from evil and enlightening and stimulating them for jihad. And self-sacrifice is our family distinction. Bravery on which leadership and rulership rest has been given to us. Friendship and affection of the faithful people which is the secret of rulership and sovereignty has been given to us i.e. it is not possible to acquire the friendship and attachment of the people by force".

By uttering these words he meant to say: "O Yazid! Allah has desired that the faithful people should love us and it is not possible to restrain them from doing so, and not do anything whereby they may become friendly towards others and inimical towards us".

Then Imam Sajjad said: "Our superiority over others, whoever they may be, rests on these distinctions: Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah, his successor Ali bin Abi Talib, Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib, the heavenly flyer, Ja'far bin Abi Talib, Hasan and Husayn, the two grandsons of the Prophet of this nation, and the Mahdi (the savior of the oppressed) viz. the twelfth Imam they all belong to us. That being so Yazid should in the first instance take away these distinctions from us, if possible, and attribute the same to himself. In other words he should distort the facts of history, if he can, so that it may give him what belongs to us, overlook his shameful and evil deeds and re-allocate the positions. Yazid should grapple with us only if he can do this. Otherwise, how can it be possible to make us obscure or to defame us or to give our right to others or to turn towards others the hearts attached to us, till the day the distinctions of Islam are with us and the members of the family of Bani Hashim like Abu Talib and his brother Hamza and his sons Ali and Ja'far and the sons of Imam Ali i.e. Hasan and Husayn are recorded in history as the most sincere servants of Allah and especially when the Prophet of Allah also belongs to the family of Bani Hashim".

Then Imam Sajjad introduced himself and the condition became such that Yazid was obliged to interrupt him and in order to achieve his end he asked the mu'azzin to pronounce the call to prayers. The Imam also became silent as a mark of respect to the name of the Almighty Lord. However, he got another opportunity soon and availed of it fully i.e. when the mu'azzin said: "I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah", Imam Sajjad took off his turban and said: "O mu'azzin! I ask you to keep quiet for the sake of the very Prophet whose name you have just taken".

Then he turned towards Yazid and said: "Is this Holy Prophet your grandfather or mine? If you say that he is your grandfather all know that you will be telling a lie. And if you say that he is my grandfather why did you kill my father, plunder his property and make his women captives?" Then he tore the collar of his shirt and continued to speak till the people were deeply moved and the gathering dispersed in a state of confusion and disorder.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-ibrahim-ayati/chapter-45-authorities-event-karbala#comment-0>