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## **Chapter 8: Mutilation of the Concept of Jihad**

In Islam, there is no concept of aggressive or preemptive war. This was amply demonstrated by the Prophet (S) throughout his life. 1 Whenever possible, the Prophet (S) negotiated for and entered into peace treatise with those who declared war against him. He sent delegations to neighboring countries inviting them to Islam; a religion and life of peace here and hereafter. The first Caliph, and more particularly Umar who acted as the chief advisor to the first caliph and later he himself as the second caliph, were fully aware of this concept of Jihad in Islam.

For the Prophet (S), there was never any need for a standing army. He was preaching the concept of One Unique God deserving worship, a harmonious coexistence and peaceful way of life full of piety and above all self-restraint and love for others. The code of conduct prescribed for the Muslims was intended to create a peaceful model society. Muslims were taught that there should be no compulsion in religion.2

Whenever individual Muslims were threatened by any aggression, they were first advised to endure it in patience and supplication. There was no scope for aggressive propagation of Islam. It was the conduct and astute way of a Muslim's life that was to provide the incentive for non–Muslims to be attracted towards Islam. This was amply proved during the first emigration of Muslims to Abyssinia where their conduct won several converts to Islam. Any difference in ideology was to be sorted out through wise and convincing exhortation and dialogue.3

All missionary zeal had to be confined to inviting men towards good, enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil. 4 If, in spite of exhortations and dialogue, someone could not be convinced about Islam, the Holy Qur'an enjoins that he should be left alone, saying "You to your ways; and I to mine." 5

Islam was a religion that meant to rule the heart of men and not their person, purse or territory. The method adopted by the Prophet (S) was to send delegations and letters to neighboring kingdoms explaining Islamic tenets and not to send armies or arsenals. In Islam, there was never any scope to maintain a standing army, nor did the Prophet (S), throughout his life, ever raise a standing army. Whenever an occasion demanded the defense of Muslims or the enforcement of a mutually agreed

covenant, volunteers were called for. There was never any compulsion that all Muslims should join the army. At any rate, there was not a semblance of an army during the Prophet's time.

The propensity of an Arab's mind, in those days, to readily incline towards all sorts of expeditions and warfare for the sake of *Ghanima* (spoils of war in the form of slave boys and girls in addition to the usual booty) was only too well–known to the *Caliphs*. 6 The *Caliphs* cleverly gave a religious colour to the adventure for the sake of infusing in their soldiers that zeal and disregard for life which is so essential for winning a war.

When Abu Bakr became the first *Caliph*, he was confronted with complicated issues of religion as well as governance. In all such cases, he referred people to Umar for finding a solution. So frequent was this done that people started asking Abu Bakr: "*Are you the Caliph or Umar is the Caliph?*" Umar was also seen to reverse several decisions made by Abu Bakr. However, invariably both Abu Bakr and Umar considered Ali (a.s.) as the final authority. They repeated the tradition in which the Prophet (S) had declared: "*Among you the best Judge is Ali*." Umar often confessed: "*But for Ali, Umar would have perished.*" Many such instances are compiled in a book under the title "*Qadhaya* (*judgments of*) *Ameerul Mo'minin.*"

Whenever Muslims met privately or in congregation after prayers, there was open and fierce discussions about the ignorance so often exhibited publicly by the Caliph and his inability to find solutions to even the simplest questions that arose. They compared the Caliph's incompetence to the ease with which Imam Ali (a.s.) solved the most difficult issues. People in every congregation, recounted the various traditions of the Prophet (S) extolling Imam Ali's supremacy over all the other Muslims in knowledge, virtue, valor and nobility. They also recounted the various occasions when the Prophet (S) nominated Imam Ali (a.s.) as his successor, and how, unfortunately, inept and ignorant persons deprived him of his rightful and deserving place. The discussions became more serious in the month of *Ramadan* when large gatherings assembled in mosques after breaking the mandatory fast. Umar found large groups openly expressing their dissatisfaction with the capabilities of the Caliph. In order to prevent such critical discussions, Umar ordered that instead of indulging in discussions, people should spend their time in prayers. People asked him as to what prayers and how much prayers are to be performed, as they did not practice any such prayers during the Prophet's time. Thus, arose the practice of *Tarawih* prayers during the month of Ramadan. The lofty matter of prayers was utilized to conceal the real intent of putting down any discussion about the Caliph. Till this day, there is raging controversy among the Sunnis as to the number of Raka's to be recited in Tarawih and whether the Tarawih is not in fact the Tahajjud (Midnight) Prayers.

The *Caliph* was fully aware of the fact that the foundation of his *Caliphate* was raised on wobbly and suspect grounds and that a popular revolt was likely to erupt any moment, seeking to restore the *Caliphate* to Imam Ali (a.s.). Therefore, the need for wars and expeditions had, perforce, to be invented and declared, so that men might be sent away to far-off places on expeditions and wars. Thus, public criticism about the competency and legitimacy of the person occupying the seat of the *Caliph* was

avoided and the possibility of immediate revolt averted. Gilman wrote: "Despots have always found it necessary to employ their subjects in foreign wars from time to time, in order to keep them away from feeling the galling chains by which they are bound, or to hear their clanking; and it came to pass that when the Caliph had all the tribes of Arabia under control, he saw no better way to retrain them from new revolts than by tempting them to make inroads upon their neighbors. Nothing could have been better planned by a ruler acquainted with the volatile nature of his subjects." On similar lines is the opinion of the great scientist, philosopher Aristotle, whom the Prophet (S) identified as one among the Apostles of God.8

The sending of foreign expeditions by the first two *Caliphs* was never a religious movement, but the political expediency that the situation demanded to safeguard their precarious perch on the *Caliphate*. What was then sought to be disseminated by the sword was the political sovereignty of the Arabs and not Islam the religion. Coupled with this, was the greed to subjugate the rich resources of opulent neighboring countries.

The principal reason for the wars was to divert the attention of Muslims from the inefficiency of the persons heading the State, by taking advantage of the Arab's greed for loot. The historian K. Ali observes that the *Caliphs* realized that the opulent lands of Persia, Egypt, Rome and Syria had to be conquered to free the Arabs from their dependence on the mercy of others and to relieve them from perennial financial embarrassment. 9 The expeditions brought immense wealth. But along with opulence, came several evils.

Nicholson observes about the ills brought by financial affluence: "The conquests made by the successors of the Prophet (S) brought enormous wealth into Mecca and Medina, and when the Umayyad aristocracy gained the upper hand in Uthman's Caliphate, these towns developed a voluptuous and dissolute life which broke through every restriction that Islam had imposed." 10 Many people joined the army in anticipation of getting large booty, others out of misguided religious fervor. In one stroke, the narration of Hadith was prevented, while simultaneously those who were criticizing the mode in which the Caliph came to power, were dispatched to far-off lands, either to lavish in their ill-gotten loot or to be branded a martyr and buried in alien lands. At any rate, the result was that potential opposition was effectively and ingeniously removed.

The cause for the war with Syria is said to be the *Caliph's* desire to carry out the last wish of the Prophet (S) who had ordered Usama to proceed towards Syria. 11 The reason given is misleading. The Prophet (S) had ordered Usama bin Zaid to proceed immediately to Mu'ta to avenge the disrespect and murder of his father Zaid who was sent as the Prophet's envoy. The Prophet (S) had ordered all the Ansar and the Muhajirin, except Ali (a.s.), to assemble under the command of Usama. Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and, of course, even during the Prophet's life, the Banu Umayya disobeyed his order and remained in Medina. Later, after the Prophet's death, the *Caliph* now pretended to fulfill the last wish of the Prophet. We have seen earlier how the last wish of the Prophet (S) to leave a written Will was defeated by this

same group of people. In fact, the incident at *Mu'ta*, during the lifetime of the Prophet (S) did not involve the Syrians at all but involved the Romans whose chieftain Shurahbil of the Banu Ghassaan murdered the Prophet's envoy. 12 Instead of Rome, Abu Bakr declared war against Syria. The War against the Romans was declared only in 634 A.D, two years after the death of the Prophet (S).

## **Greed and Territorial Expansion: Motive for the Early Wars**

Though the wars were given a religious colour by misinterpreting the word 'Jihad', the real reason was purely mercenary, coupled with the desire to annex neighboring countries.

About the war with Syria, K. Ali writes, "There were other causes that widened the gulf of relationship. Arabia is a land of desert and hence its inhabitants had to seek their fortunes outside Arabia. On the other hand, the Byzantine Empire was famous for its richness and better living and so the Muslims, in order to solve their economic problems, turned their eyes towards the Byzantine Empire. Besides, the strategic position of the Byzantine Empire was such that it was necessary for the safety and defense of Islam." 13 Abu Bakr made Yazid ibn Abu Sufyan, the Governor of Syria. On Yazid's death, his brother Mu'awiya succeeded as Governor, perpetuating a family rule that lasted for almost a century.

About the war with Persia, K. Ali writes, "From the geographical point of view, Iraq, a province of the then Persian Empire, formed the natural part of Arabia. Hence, it was essential to the Arabs...The economic factor was not less important in deciding the fate of Persia. Iraq is a land of immense wealth due to the flow of the Euphrates and the Tigris over the surface of the province. Being a barren land, Arabia depended on the province of Iraq for trade. But, the Persians did not allow the Islamized Arabia to carry on the trade with them. So, the economic necessity drove the Muslims to come into conflict with the Persians." 14

That the wars were nothing but empire building and moneymaking is admitted by the Sunni Historians K. Ali: "When Abu Bakr was on his deathbed, Muslims had defeated the Roman and Syrian frontiers. After that, Khalid bin al–Waleed annexed Damascus, Ardan, and Hims one after another to the empire of Islam." 15

That empire building and economic considerations were the sole motive for the wars against Palestine and Egypt is admitted by K. Ali in these words: "The causes for the conquest of Egypt are not far to seek. The strategic position of Egypt, the richness of its grain producing soil and the enmity of the Roman Emperor led the caliph to turn his attention to the conquest of Egypt. The Byzantines had been living in Egypt since their expulsion from Syria and Palestine. It was not safe for the Muslims to allow them to live so near to Syria and Palestine. Besides that Egypt was lying so dangerously near to Hijaz that it might be great danger to the Muslims... The Arabs were not free from financial embarrassment. They had to depend on the mercy of others for the solution of their economic problem. Egypt was a rich country due to the flow of the Nile on its surface... So, the Muslims, in order to improve their lot and weaken the economic position of the Byzantines, felt it necessary to conquer it." 16 Amr bin al-Aas was made the

Governor of Egypt. Later Marwan and Khalid bin al-Walid became governors under the rule of the Banu Umayya.

Thus, the wars waged during the period of the first two Caliphs were based on political and economic expediency. There is absolutely no element of religion or holiness in the wars, except that the successful warmongers went by the name of 'Muslims'. To call these 'wars' as 'Holy Wars' or 'Islamic Wars' will be the greatest abuse and injustice to the noble word 'Jihad' the greatest of which is the Jihad an–Nafs; the strife against the carnal desires of the self. All the wars were either imperialistic preemptive aggression or for aggrandizement. Such wars satiated the corporeal desires, in the process building an Empire in the name of Islam. Such wars had absolutely nothing to do with Islam the religion of Peace and Brotherhood, so strenuously propagated by the Prophet (S). Nicholson observes: "The Empire founded by the Caliph Umar and administered by the Umayyads was essentially, as the reader will have gathered, a military organisation for the benefit of the paramount race." 17 The well–known Sunni writer Shibli reports from Abu Dawud that the Arabs repeatedly asked the Prophet (S) whether a man would get any reward for Jihad if he also had any worldly gain in view, and every time the Prophet (S) replied that persons who had worldly gain in view, would not get any reward in the next world for his Jihad. 18

The institutions of the army and the treasury were created for the first time in Islam by Abu Bakr who molded them on the Roman Model. These two institutions, as we have seen above, had no place in Islam nor did they have the sanction of the Prophet (S). They were innovations introduced into Islam that were catastrophic, changing Islam the religion of peace into a band of sword wielding, unlettered and uncivilized men who called themselves Muslims.

The Muslims in the army, young and old, coming from far and near, towns and desert, had no opportunity to understand anything about Islam. They were forbidden to hear traditions that were the only other source, apart from the Qur'an, to impart knowledge of Islam. The Qur'an itself required knowledge of its special literary quality, the idioms, parables, history, science, fables, the esoteric meaning, exegeses, annotations with reference to the cause and circumstances of revelations in order to understand the meaning of its verses. Most of the Muslims remained ignorant of the real Islam, but externally appearing to be Muslims.

The army, for its commanders, had such inveterate enemies to the Prophet (S) and his Message, as Mu'awiya bin Abu Sufyan, Khalid bin al-Walid, and Amr bin al-Aas. They had the least knowledge of or care for Islam. For them, Islam was an empire and all that was involved was politics and economics. They flouted all the laws of Islam. Drinking was the most common habit for them. Mu'awiya used to recite a couplet saying, "The Banu Hashim has played with the rule; no archangel ever descended nor was anything revealed (to Muhammad)." Amr bin al-Aas fixed the Qur'an on the door and pierced it with arrows. Khalid bin al-Walid was an incorrigible debauch. One can imagine the faith of the ordinary soldier under such commanders. The pity of the matter is that the commanders went unpunished though the Caliph fully knew their crimes. Later historians glorified them as 'able' commanders, concealing the

atrocities they committed.

About the Muslims assembled by the Caliphs into an army to invade the advanced civilizations of Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Rome, the best description is given by Nicholson: "Against such (Islamic) doctrines, the conservative and materialistic instincts of the desert people rose in revolt; and although they became Muslims en masse, the majority of them neither believed in Islam nor knew what it meant." 19

These half-baked Muslims were dumbstruck when they came face to face with the material pomp and glory and a great wealth of philosophy of the civilizations they conquered. They had no answer to the philosophies and debates prevalent among those whom they conquered. The only answer they could find was to consider themselves mere pawns in the hands of an unseen 'destiny'. They became numb fatalists, resigned to their fate. The reason is analyzed ably by Osborne who observed, "Fatalism is thus the central theme of Islam... The great bulk of the people are passive; wars and revolutions rage around them; they accept them as the decrees of a fate which it is useless to strive against." But in fact, such fatalism is completely alien to Islam.

As we noted above that the very object of the wars was to gain economic advantage and acquire territory, there was much pillage and looting. The rulers led a grandiose and pompous life indulging in the very luxuries that Islam had prohibited.

The expeditions brought, in addition to immense wealth, a plethora of cultures, alien to Islam and unknown to the Arabs. While wealth brought back the pagan spirit of unrestrained, indulgent life, the cultures brought in philosophies which puzzled the conquering Arabs. The ancient civilizations of Rome, Babylon and the Indus valley had their own philosophies. The Arabs, intoxicated with wine and wealth, could hardly care to understand the alien philosophies or to distinguish Islam from such philosophies.

Those Muslims, who had no any interest in the preservation of Islamic philosophy, found that they, personally, were not aware of any answer to such philosophies as reincarnation, transmigration, karma, nirvana...etc. They could never know the Islamic philosophy regarding Divine Decrees and Human Volition. They simply resigned themselves to fate, which they assumed had made them rulers of a vast empire out of the nomads of the Arabian Desert. All this was on account of their abandoning Ali (a.s.) and the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) who were the fountainhead of the Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy.

S.M. Mirza wrote, "It can well be imagined in what shape Islam emerged from the medley of ideas, in which the doctrines of genuine Islam had the weakest position. It was itself an immature, imperfect and defective Islam, which the armies carried to foreign lands and gave to the converts, who in turn, mixed it with their old ideas and habits of thought. It was almost inevitable that their Islam should have more of a paganistic than an Islamic tincture.21

In such a situation, the *Caliph*, as much puzzled as the common soldier in an alien land, passed an edict that if one did not find a ready answer in the Qur'an or the Sunna, he should use his conjecture to arrive

at a solution. This played havoc with Islam which became distorted, assuming any shape that a man could imagine, completely distorting the basic and most vital Islamic concept about God. Thus, they assumed God to have a human-like body that would become visible on the Doomsday. The license to find your own solution gave rise to any number of cults, quite foreign and opposed to Islam. Thus, people imagined that they could realise God within themselves, with the help of wine and opiates.

Agha S.M. Mirza wrote: "The state of things, coupled with the fact that the Muslims, during the early Caliphate, had been given the sanction to use their own judgement in religious matters if they thought there was nothing in the Qur'an or Hadith applicable to the case under consideration, 22 led to Islam being rent asunder into different sects, most of them taking their inspiration not from the Qur'an but from the atheistic philosophies of Greece and India." 23 That was because the conquering young Muslims, uninitiated in the Philosophy or study of Islam, thought that they had nothing suitable to give in return for the Greek philosophy or the Hindu Vedanta.

The sects they invented were a curious mix of paganism, pantheism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Greek philosophy and Vedanta. They had nothing to do with the simple philosophy of Islam taught by the Prophet (S). Thus, the Sufis emerged, absorbing into Islam such paganistic beliefs as Incarnation, Nirvana, Karma...etc., by giving them Arabic terminology of *Hulul, Haqiqah, Fana*'...etc. The effect was that Muslims became either fatalists or persons like Junayd and Mansur al–Hallaj, who claimed that they were personifications of God [Haq]. Their search for God invariably started in the hallucinations created by opiates or a drug of Hashish.

The proponent of each sect took care to meet the political exigencies which required that Islam be so molded, the Qur'an so interpreted and explained, as to support the usurpers of power on the death of the Holy Prophet (S), for they were required to justify and explain to the public that all that was done, indeed had Divine sanction. Agha M.S. Mirza has written a detailed book in Urdu setting out all the amendments, modifications, abrogations and distortions made in the Islamic Theology, by the first three Caliphs, the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers.24

It is Abu Bakr and Umar who had gifted Syria to the notorious sons of Abu Sufyan and gifted Egypt to the equally notorious Marwan. It is their offspring, the Umayyads, steeped in paganism who, submerged in lust and wine, came to rule the Islamic State for over a century. Muslim historians note that the greatest possible harm was done to Islam under the Umayyads in the first instance and later on by the Abbasids, and that in the midst of worldly grandeur and power, Islam stood deserted and forlorn.25

The first Caliph came to power through an election of sorts by a handful of persons at Saqifa at a time when the Prophet's body lay unburied. At the time of his death, the first Caliph, instead of letting Muslims elect their leader, left a will nominating the second Caliph as his successor. It is curious that when questioned whether the Prophet (S) did not nominate any one to succeed him, the first Caliph had quoted the tradition that 'prophets do not leave behind any inheritance'. But when his turn came, the first Caliph made a will of the Caliphate as if it were a heritable property belonging to him.

It is thus that the mode in which the second Caliph came to power was not through any election of sorts or through election by a committee but by nomination by the first Caliph. The third Caliph, on the other hand, was chosen by a select committee nominated by the second Caliph, with one member of the committee having the casting vote. Thus, the ascension of the first three Caliphs to power was retrograde, going from democratic process of sorts to autocratic nominations by individuals or by a one-sided committee selected by an individual.

During the period of the first *Caliph* as well as during his own tenure, the second Caliph is credited with planning and executing the territorial expansion of the Muslim Empire. He is also reported to have burnt or destroyed libraries and works of arts and sciences, which he considered not in consonance with his understanding of the Qur'an. If the books were in agreement with the Qur'an, he still decreed that they should be destroyed as being redundant. It is due to this that it became notorious that Muslims propagated Islam with sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other. He also entertained Abu Sufiyan, Marwan, and Mu'awiya into his close, but private circle of influential political advisors.

- 1. Abu Dawud, vol. 1, p.348, the Caliphate, p. 323.
- 2. Qur'an, 2:256.
- 3. Qur'an, 16:125.
- 4. Qur'an, 3:104.
- 5. Qur'an, 109:6.
- 6. Shibli's Seeratun Nabi, vol. 1, part 1, p.444-447.
- 7. The Saracens, Ch.25, p.226.
- 8. Shirazi's Asaar-e-Tarikh Ajam, p 37.
- 9. A study of Islamic History, p. 101.
- 10. Literary History of the Arabs, p.241.
- 11. K. Ali's 'A Study of Islamic History', p.82–83.
- 12. K. Ali's 'A Study of Islamic History, p.89, 97.
- 13. Ibid., p.97-98.
- 14. Ibid., p.94.
- 15. K. Ali's 'A Study of Islamic History', p.98.
- 16. lbid., p. 101
- 17. A Literary History of the Arabs, p. 254.
- 18. Seeratun Nabi, quoting Abu Dawud, Vol. 1, p.348.
- 19. R.A. Nicholson's 'Literary History of the Arabs', p. 178.
- 20. Islam under the Arabs, p.26.
- 21. The Caliphate, 340.
- 22. Shibli's Al-Faruq, Part 2, p.64, 240.
- 23. The Caliphate, p. 335-336.
- 24. Kitabul Tafriq Wal Tahrif Fil Islam.
- 25. Abul Hasan an-Nadawi's Seerat Ahmed Shahid, p.21.

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