

Conditions prevailing after Ali

These calamities and social and moral evils began to appear in the Arab world, and gained strength in the East from the day on which the sinful hand of Ibn Muljim was stretched towards the specimen of justice and the embodiment of virtue viz. Ali son of Abu Talib.

It appears necessary to mention briefly the conditions of the Arab nation after the martyrdom of Imam Ali and to explain what shape the things assumed during the periods of Bani Umayyah and Bani Abbas, what the activities of these rulers, who deviated from the principles laid down by Ali, were, and how the common man became very cheap and was transferred like inheritance from one group to another.

The caliphate of Imam Ali was an interval between the period of Uthman and that of Mu`awiya and his successors. During this interval truth and justice enjoyed a very high position. However, during the period preceding it the rights of the people were violated. The people belonging to the upper class did not submit to the authority of government. The result was that injustice and oppression was rampant. The chiefs of the nation, the officers and the governors had become a cause of affliction for the people and were devouring their property. The advisers and associates of Uthman were perfect despots.

It will be better to explain here the condition of the rulers and the subjects during the periods of Bani Umayyah and Bani Abbas so that the value of the rules and principles laid down by Ali may be clearly understood and the readers may realize how sublime his wisdom and thinking was. His sword nipped selfishness in the bud and his righteous hand annihilated falsehood.

As soon as Ali was martyred at the hands of the accursed Ibn Muljim, Mu`awiya son of Abu Sufyan began planning against the opponents of his caliphate. He severely punished every person who declined to acknowledge him as the caliph of God. He had not yet completed his task when he began levelling the ground for the succession of his son, the notorious Yazid as caliph. He adopted all possible means which could be useful for the kingship of his son. He bestowed honours on some persons and deprived others of position and authority. Out of the numerous plans which Mu`awiya contrived for taking the oath of allegiance from the people for Yazid we make a mention of one which will go to show the foundation on which the caliphate of Yazid and his successors was established.

Mu`awiya arranged a gathering so that the people from different provinces should collectively take oath of allegiance to his son Yazid during his own lifetime. When the people assembled, Mu`awiya and Yazid were also present. At that moment a flatterer named Yazid son of Muqanna rose and said pointing to Mu`awiya: "This is the Commander of the Faithful" Then he pointed to Yazid and said: "If Mu`awiya passes away it will be he". Then he pointed to his sword and said: "If any person does not agree to this his punishment will be this". Mu`awiya said: "Sit down for you are the chief of the orators".

The people of the Hijaz did not agree to take oath of allegiance to Yazid. They could neither be allured by wealth nor were they afraid of the military power. Mu`awiya's behaviour with those people is surprising. Once he threatened them saying: "I swear by God that if any person utters even one word here against me he will be beheaded before he utters the second word. You people should, therefore, take care of your lives and should not seek death". He posted two observers for each person belonging to the Hijaz and said to the police-officer: "Whoever from amongst these persons opens his lips to refute or to affirm, his head should be chopped off".

It was in this manner that Yazid son of Mu`awiya attained to the caliphate.

Abdullah son of Hanzala said: "We were afraid that if we did not oppose Yazid stones will rain on our heads from the heavens and all of us would be annihilated because of the divine wrath. It was for this reason that we opposed him".

It was the same Yazid who martyred Imam Husayn in a very tragic manner, besieged the Ka`abah and stoned it with the help of the catapult, made the blood and the property of the people of Madina lawful for his soldiers, and lived a life of sensuality and pleasure. He used to play with dogs and monkeys till he died and was succeeded by other members of the Umayyad family. They distributed the property of the public treasury among their relatives and associates. The place of justice which was founded by Ali was destroyed by them and an unjust group assumed the reins of government. One group of persons became very rich and the other was reduced to extreme poverty. When thousands were starving, the Umayyad caliph gave twelve thousand dinars to the singer named Ma`abad, because he had amused the caliph with his music. The nobles possessed innumerable slaves and slave-girls. Seventy thousand of them were set free by Sulaiman son of Abdul Malik alone. Partiality and bias on account of race, family or party, was very common during the Umayyad rule although Islam had destroyed such bias and Imam Ali had not permitted it.

During that age discrimination was made between the people of Yemen and Bani Qais. The Arabs claimed superiority over the non-Arabs and similarly the Qurayshites claimed to be superior to others. Their courts were full of pleasure-loving persons who got large funds from the public treasury without doing any public service. History tells that Walid bin Abdul Malik disallowed the stipends of more than twenty thousand stipendiaries. These were the ways and manners of all Umayyads except Umar ibn Abdul Aziz. They gained mastery over various regions by means of oppression, and performed the task of Mu`awiya and Yazid.

Abdul Malik bin Marwan used to issue orders according to his own wish and did not attach any importance to the lives and property of the people. He ordered the wells and the springs of Bahrain to be filled with dust so that the residents of that area might become indigent, and obey the government. He appointed a cruel and bloodthirsty person like Hajjaj bin Yusuf as Governor of Iraq.

Amin Rayhani says thus about Bani Umayyah: "The Umayyad rulers had reversed justice which should necessarily be observed by a monarch. This was a group of mean and incompetent persons. If one of them was a fool the other was despicable. If one was humble and devoid of honour the other was a drunkard and an oppressor. At least one cannot overlook the abominable and wicked practice of theirs that they abused Ali and his sons from the pulpits".

Amongst Bani Umayyah there was only one just caliph and he was Umar ibn Abdul Aziz. He started his rule with doing away with injustice. He wanted to get the looted property of the public treasury restored to it and to adopt a sensible policy for his caliphate. However, some people were not happy with this attitude of his and assassinated him.

Bani Umayyah attained to the caliphate by deceit, and converted it into kingship by coercion, and established a kingdom in which there was not a trace of equity and justice. At last the palace of their government became shaky and fell on their own heads.

After them came Bani Abbas and the impartial persons praised Bani Umayyah as compared with them.

Amin Rayhani says: "Bani Abbas gained control over the country by means of bloodshed. There were horrible scenes of massacres and bloodshed in Syria, Palestine, and Iraq and after which other chiefs also followed the example of Abu'l Abbas Saffah in killing and bloodshedding.

A man named Ameetar invited people to himself in Syria. The Yemenites obeyed him but Bani Qais rose against him. Ameetar launched a night attack on them and burnt their property and houses. Another person named Ibn Bahees fought against Ameetar, gained control over Damascus and punished the residents of that city.

During the time of Bani Abbas revolts and disturbances were rampant and the party spirit was gaining strength. And it was not only the cruel and blood thirsty rebels who were suffering, but the poor subjects who paid revenue and were always ready to partake in jihad were also involved in troubles".

Thereafter, referring to the big and small principalities of the last days of Bani Abbas, Amin Rayhani says: "The people who lived in that dark age were very unlucky. Every ruler vied with another in bloodshed and warfare and was proud of his atrocities. He told his soldiers: "I hereby make it lawful for you to do anything you like with this city for three days". With these words they permitted the plundering of a city and shedding of the blood of its residents. Mutanabbi says: "The women who befriended them were to be made prisoners, their children were to be killed, the wealth accumulated by them was to be looted and their crops were to be burnt".

Fie upon that time, and upon the fear of the people of that time. May God bless those helpless people and may those rulers and soldiers be accursed! Does man who is God's best creation get metamorphosed at one time into a ferocious animal? Do these savages deserve that fifty pages of history should be allocated to them? No; their acts should be summarized only in one line; they became fell enemies of one another, fought, killed, looted and burnt, and were guilty of atrocities or in other words they considered the lives, property and honour of others to be lawful for themselves.

These are the remarks of Amin Rayhani about the period of Bani Abbas and the plundering and bloodshed of the small principalities during the last days of their caliphate i.e. when the caliphs were only in name and real authority and gone out of their hands.

Now we shall speak briefly about the period of Bani Abbas. It has been mentioned earlier, that Bani Umayyah opposing the system of government which the Commander of the Faithful wished to introduce, and abandoning the just policy adopted by him, had treated the government to be their family property. They did not permit anyone to share their authority. They adopted Fascist policies as if the government and its revenues belonged to them only and none else had even the smallest share in them.

When Bani Abbas came at the helm of affairs after Bani Umayyah, they also based their administration on the same ideas.

They also held the view that the king was God's vicegerent on earth and it was his inherent right to rule. None else was entitled to bring about any change in this arrangement. It was on account of this very view that Mansur, the second Abbasid caliph, said while speaking before a public gathering: "O People! I am the king of the earth appointed by God. I rule over you with His blessing and help. I am the custodian of God's property. I utilize the public treasury with His will. Whatever I give to anyone is given with His permission, because He has made me the lock of His treasury. If He wants to give you something He will open that lock and if He does not like to give you anything He will keep it closed".

The same policy was followed by other caliphs of the Abbasid family. Every one of them was the vicegerent of God on earth.

This goes to show very clearly that cruelty was the foundation of the government of Bani Abbas and their subordinate princes and rulers. According to them sovereignty was a divine gift. God bestowed this gift upon those whom He liked and when He willed the welfare of the people He provided them with a kind, wise and generous ruler.

The result of this way of thinking and this idea and belief was that the people remained obedient to the Abbasid rulers and patiently bore whatever befell them considering it to be from God.

Baghdad, the capital of Bani Abbas, was overflowing with wealth, but this entire wealth was meant only for the caliph and his relatives and associates. Others, however competent they might be and whatever services they might have rendered to the nation had no share in the wealth, and were doomed to

poverty and abjectness unless they flattered the caliph and humiliated themselves before him.

As a consequence of this two classes of people came into being. There was a vast difference between these two classes. People belonging to one class rolled in wealth whereas those belonging to the other class, however skilled and efficient they might be, remained indigent and poor, and led very miserable lives. The revenues and income of the government were spent by the caliph, his relatives and courtiers, to lead lives of pleasure. They spent millions on their associates, flatterers, slave-girls and eunuchs.

From the point of view of wealth the caliph, the princes, the nobles and government officers belonged to the highest class. The tradesmen came next. Although their lives and property, too, were in constant danger on account of the high-ups, but as regards wealth they enjoyed a position next to the nobility. The only things which fell to the share of the common man were, however, abjectness, helplessness, hunger and death. In Baghdad the lofty palaces of the rich and the dilapidated huts of the poor stood side by side. It might be said that they presented a scene of paradise and hell. A poet of that time says about Baghdad:

“This Baghdad is fit for only rich people to live in, and not for the poor and the indigent.

If a rich man like Korah happens to come to Baghdad he too would be filled with sadness and perplexity. Baghdad is the very paradise which has been promised us, but it has come prematurely into the hands of those who possess sufficient to eat and to wear.

In Baghdad there are houris and young servants and there is everything which you may desire. The thing which is not found here is human being”.

A pleasure-loving rich man says: “Have you ever seen a city like Baghdad in the whole world? This Baghdad is the paradise on earth.

In Baghdad the fountain of enjoyment is pure and the tree of pleasure is green. At other places, however, life is neither pure nor happy.

One enjoys longer life in Baghdad. Its food and water is delicious and dainty. There is no doubt about the fact that the food and water of some lands is better than that of others”.

It is not objectionable that Baghdad had been a paradise on earth during the Abbasid period or for that matter during all periods. It is also not something wrong that the fountain of pleasure in that city had been pure and the tree of happiness had been green. There is also no harm in the lives of the residents of that city being long. Nothing out of these things is wrong, man always seeks to live a life in a paradise, where there are all means of comforts – fruits and flowers and every good thing. But all these things can be good only if they have not been acquired by exploiting the poor and the helpless or by snatching away from the orphans and the widows. Where did these means of pleasure come from when there were thousands of indigent persons who did not eat to their fill even once throughout their lives in that city?

The famous poet Abu'l Atahiya addresses the caliph of his time thus expressing the sentiments of the

people: “Is there anyone who should convey my frequent counsels to the caliph? I see that the cost of living of the people is very high and their incomes are very low. Their needs are innumerable and they are attacked in the morning and in the evening by calamities and hardships.

The orphans and the widows are sitting empty-handed in their lonely homes. The men as well as the women are stretching their hands towards you so that you may do them some favour.

All complain of the hardships of life, and are raising cries in low tones. They hope for your kindness so that they may get rid of difficulties and see the face of comfort. Mothers, with children in their laps, go without meals during night and fast during day time. Who is there who should fill their empty bellies and dress their naked bodies? I am informing you about true facts on behalf of your subjects”.

A man came to see the caliph Wathiq Billah. He draws a picture of the pomp of the caliph and the magnificence and grandeur of his palace in these words. (It should be remembered that this is about the magnificence of one palace only):

“One servant entrusted me to another and the second entrusted me to a third one. Having passed in this manner through the hands of many servants I arrived in a building, whose courtyard and walls were covered with painted brocade. Then I arrived in the royal court. Its ground and walls were also covered with brocade. In the middle of the hall Wathiq was sitting on his throne. The throne was bedecked with pearls. His slave-girl Farida was sitting with a guitar in her hand. Wathiq as well as the slave-girl were wearing costly brocade dresses.

This luxurious life and capitalistic pomp was a contagious disease from which all including the caliph, his relatives and courtiers as well as some businessmen were suffering. As regards other indecent acts which were done in the royal palace it is better not to mention them.

The purchase and sale of slaves and slave-girls for money which was not permitted either by the Prophet or by Imam Ali [1](#) was so much in progress that in every city there used to be separate bazaar for this particular trade.

In Baghdad, which was the capital of the Abbasids, Dar-al-Raiq road is a well-known place which was used for this purpose. The dealers in slaves had slaves and slave-girls of every race and colour. Black coloured slaves were brought from the south to the Abbasid Cities and sold at two hundred dirhams per head. White coloured slaves and slave-girls were brought from Samarkand which was a big market for the slaves of this type. There were many kinds of slave-girls. Some of them belonged to Kandhar and Sind. They were slim and had black eyes and long hair, Some of them were those who had been trained in Madina. They were coquettish and adept musical performers. Those brought up in Mecca were matchless in their elegance and bewitching looks. Some slave-girls also came from the western countries.

The middleman Abu Uthman who possessed full information about the attributes of the slaves and

slave-girls of that time says: "A slave-girl should be born in Barbary and should quit her country at the age of nine years. She should spend three years in Madina and three years in Mecca. At the age of sixteen years she should go to Iraq and learn social manners there. She should be sold when she attains the age of twenty five years. Such a slave-girl will combine in herself her inherent charm, the coquetry of Madina, the elegance of Mecca and the decency and manners of Iraq.

Unfortunately Abu Uthman has failed to mention as to how much price such a slave-girl would have fetched.

Besides the slave-girls who belonged to Barbary there were also Ethiopian, Turkish, Cypriot, Roman and Armenian slave-girls whose attributes need not be mentioned here. The slave-girls belonging to each country had their particular qualities and characteristics which have been mentioned in detail by the experts of that time.

Not to speak of the poor people in the Abbasid period even the rich did not feel that their lives and property were secure. The lives of the people were in the hands of the monarch and they were afraid that they might lose their property or lives at any moment. Hence, if on the one hand the generosity of the caliph and his nobles knew no limits there was also no limit of the exploitation of the people by them. If at one time the caliph gave thousands of dinars to a person for his having uttered a beautiful verse, at another time he ordered that a person might be beheaded immediately and his property might be confiscated.

Attabi has drawn a very realistic picture of the conditions prevailing in his time. He was asked as to why he did not try to seek some position in the royal court when he was a man of letters. He replied: "I see that at one time the caliph gives thousands of dinars to a person without any justification and without his having deserved it, and at another time he orders that an innocent man may be thrown on the ground from the roof of his palace. If I join the royal court I do not know which of these two fates I shall meet".

Once the caliph Mehdi summoned Mufazzal Zabi to his court. When the caliph's messenger approached him he feared that possibly someone had spoken ill of him before the caliph. He, therefore, wore a shroud under his clothes and reached the royal court fully prepared for his death. He saluted the caliph and the latter replied to his salutation. Then he stood quietly. After sometime he realized that the caliph had no intention of killing him and, therefore, became calm, Mehdi asked him: "Which Arab poet has composed the best verse on the subject of taking pride and glorying?" He also asked him some other questions and Mufazzal gave appropriate replies. Mehdi was pleased with his replies and questioned him about his personal affairs. Mufazzal told the caliph that he was indebted and thereupon the caliph ordered that he might be given thirty thousand dirhams.

Mamun executed his minister Fazal bin Sahl and then offered the ministry to Ahmad ibn Abi Khalid, but he declined to accept the post. On having been asked as to why he rejected the offer Ahmad replied: "My experience is that whoever has held this office has eventually lost his life".

The result of affluence was that revelry knew no bounds and had spread like a contagious disease. In every house there were innumerable slave-girls who were experts in singing, dancing and coquetry. ² When the rich persons got tired of one means of enjoyment they invented another. At times when they were overjoyed on hearing a good song and did not know how to express their pleasure they were beside themselves and struck and wounded their own heads with anything they could lay their hands on. Abu'l Faraj Isfahani in his 'Aghani' and many other historians have narrated numerous such incidents. The reason of their becoming beside themselves was that they did not know to express their mirth and joy; hence they invented new devices every day.

On the other side there were innumerable indigent persons, who living in misery and abjectness, were fed up with their lives. One group was leading an extremely luxurious life, while the people of the other group were fed up with their very existence. They despised their life as well as their society and culture. They had no hope of the condition of the society being better off. Abu'l Atahiya expresses the feelings of those people in these words: "The dry bread which you eat sitting in a corner and the narrow house in which you spend your days; or the corner of a Masjid in which you can live in seclusion are better than the moments which are spent under the shade of lofty palaces. This is a counsel from one who knows the real position fully well. Happy is he who hears my advice.

I swear by my life that this piece of advice is sufficient for him. Lend your ears to this advice of your well-wisher who is called Abu'l Atahiya".

Both the conditions of committing suicide by drowning oneself in joy and mirth or by abandoning the world are opposed to human nature. The Almighty God has not created man either for this mode of life or for that; however, during the Abbasid period these two evils were very common.

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What has been stated above is a glimpse of the conditions of the people during early days of the Abbasid rule. Later their lives became so miserable that it is not possible to imagine their abjectness. The rich became richer and the poor became much poorer. The rich were small in number but the indigent were innumerable. However, the lives and property of neither of them were secure.

Only a few persons viz. the monarch and his relatives and associates felt secure and satisfied. None of the other rich persons enjoyed peace of mind. They were constantly afraid that the caliph might get annoyed with them at any time and this might result in confiscation of their property and loss of their life. This type of cruelty began during the time of Mutawakkil – the man who constructed hell side by side with paradise.

The rich had become absolutely shameless. They drank wine and became devoid of their senses. They arranged feasting and drinking in their palaces and became riotously festive. They at times tore their clothes and rolled on the ground. They lost all sense of decency and indulged in all sorts of evil deeds. While intoxicated some of them thought that they had made the earth tremble by striking their feet on it.

Many such stories have been narrated by Abu Hayyan Tauhidi in his book entitled `Al-Mata`a wa al-Mawanisah'.

The number of the slave-girls in those times was unprecedented. Mutawakkil, who insulted the wise and zealous persons as much as possible, tried his best to drown Imam Husayn's grave in water and allowed the ruffians in his court to ridicule and insult Imam Ali, had thousands of slave-girls in his palace. Some Abbasid caliphs had as many as ten thousand slave-girls. Besides the slave-girls there were innumerable eunuchs in their palaces. Wealthy persons and those belonging to the aristocratic class kept eunuchs in their houses for the protection of their females. During the days of Amin the number of the eunuchs increased very much. The caliph Muqtadir had as many as eleven thousand eunuchs. The middle class also possessed many slaves who were very immodest. The masters took shameful services from their slaves.

The root cause of all these evils was that the nobility and the rich persons had ignored the principles laid down by the Prophet and Imam Ali. They did not consider human being equal to one another. The rich and the persons in high positions considered themselves to be superior to the ordinary people and led luxurious lives by exploiting the poor.

We would like to talk once again about the habits and morals of the people during the Abbasid period to throw light on the luxurious and voluptuous life led by the nobles and the rich, and the indigence and helplessness to which the poor were subjected. The fact is that in a society whose members are usually indigent there two things viz. affluence and indigence are bound to occur. We may notice this fact in the light of what Imam Ali said: "I have not seen excessive wealth with anyone except when side by side therewith I have seen a right being violated".

Magnificent palaces were constructed and on them enormous amount of money was spent. Mutawakkil got constructed many palaces, whose beauty and splendour was beyond description. In one of these palaces a big swimming pool was constructed for the ladies and the slave-girls. When the famous poet Behtri saw that palace he was so much impressed by its grandeur that he thought that it had been constructed by the fiends and the genii. Describing the palace he says:

"It appears as if the genii subordinate to Prophet Suleiman had constructed this palace and worked hard on every detail.

If Bilquis, the queen of Sheba were to pass through this palace she would have mistaken it for Suleiman's palace on account of great resemblance of the two.

When you look at this pool at night and see the reflection of the stars in it you will think that the pool is the sky and the stars are studded in it. The fish cannot reach the bank of the pool, because there is a great distance between its beginning and end".

Yaqt Hamavi writes in Mu`jam al-Buldan: "None of the other caliphs built such magnificent buildings in Samarra as were built by Mutawakkil. Besides other buildings there were a number of palaces namely

Qasr al-`Arus which cost thirty million dirhams, Qasr al-Ja`fari, Qasr al-Gharib, Qasr al-Shaidan, Qasr al-Burj and Qasr al-Bustan Aitakhyah which cost ten million dirhams each, and Qasr al-Maleeh and Qasr al-Subh which cost five million dirhams each”.

After giving a long list of the palaces Yaqut Hamavi says that a sum of three hundred million dirhams was spent on them.

Praising Mutawakkil's Qasr al-Ja`fari the poet Ali son of Jehm says: “There are such masterpieces of art in this palace as must not have been seen by the Roman and Iranian emperors during their long rule. There are such spacious court-yards in it that the eyes must travel long to see their rarities and curiosities.

And there are such high domes that it might be said that they are chatting with the stars.

Ibn Mu`tiz got built a palace, whose roof was constructed with bricks of gold, and trees were planted around it. Bahtri praises the palace in these words:

“Its roof was made of gold and was bright and luminous. Its light prevailed everywhere.

The breeze loitered in it and the fruitless trees and fruit trees were always swinging.

They were like delicate maidens who come out for a walk – some of them having ornaments and others being without them”.

One of the palaces got built by the caliph Mu`tazid was called Qasr al-Surayya. It was very spacious and was very finely decorated, so much so that Ibn Mu`tiz, who had built this palace himself, considered it to be the workmanship of the genii.

The historian Khatib Baghdadi has drawn a comprehensive picture of this palace while describing the meeting of the Roman ambassador with the caliph. He says:

“Muqtadir had eleven thousand eunuchs and thousands of Sicilian, Roman and Ethiopian slaves. This was one aspect of the palace. There were also other innumerable items which contributed to its beauty and elegance. Muqtadir had ordered that the ambassador should be taken round the entire palace and should also be shown the store-houses wherein very valuable articles had been stored in a very beautiful manner. Costly pearls had been set in cases which were covered with black-painted silken cloth. The ambassador was brought in a hall wherein stood a tree made of pure silver which weighed five hundred thousand dirhams. There were also many birds made of silver which were fixed to the branches of the tree and as and when the wind blew they began to whistle. The ambassador was wonder-struck to see all this.

The curtains suspended on the walls of this palace numbered thirty eight thousand. All these curtains were made of silk and brocade. They were painted in various ways and contained pictures of animals and boats. The big curtains were the best specimens of the workmanship of the Armenians and the Venetians. Some of them were plain and others were painted.

Thereafter the ambassador was taken to the stable. The porch of this building rested on marble pillars. In the right half of the stable there were five hundred horses fully equipped with bridles and saddles but without saddle-covers and in the left half there were also five hundred horses which were equipped with bridles, saddles and silken saddle-covers. For every horse there was a servant clad in a costly uniform.

Then the ambassador was taken to the building wherein tamed wild animals were kept. They used to come to the visitors and smell them, and also ate things from their hands.

Then the ambassador was brought to another building wherein he saw four elephants covered with painted silken sheets. Many servants were posted there to look after the elephants. When the ambassador saw the elephants he was struck with terror.

Thereafter the ambassador was taken to a building where one hundred ferocious animals were kept. Fifty of them were kept in one portion of the building and fifty in another.

Then he was brought to a place called `Josaq'. This place was surrounded by gardens and in the middle of it a pool made of pewter had been built. A canal which was also made of pewter had been built around this pool. This pool, which was thirty cubits long and twenty cubits wide was more beautiful than one made of silver. It contained four boats in which golden chairs had been placed to sit in.

There were four hundred trees in the garden situated around the pool and each of those trees was five cubits in height. Every tree was covered from top to bottom with painted ebony wherein bronze rings were fixed. On the right bank of the pool there were fifteen statues of mounted soldiers, clad in silk, who held spears in their hands as if they were going to attack an enemy. Fifteen more statues had been installed on the left bank.

After the ambassador had been taken round twenty three magnificent palaces he was brought in a courtyard which was called "Tas`eeni". In this court-yard young slaves were standing and all of them were fully armed. Then he was brought before the caliph Muqtadir in Qasr al-Taj which was situated on the bank of the river Tigris. He was wearing a crown which was called Taweela and was dressed in silk and brocade from head to feet. His throne was made of ebony and its carpet was made of painted silk and brocade. Nine strings of very precious pearls were suspended on the right side of the throne and as many on its left side". (Sakhi al-Islam, vol. 1, page 100 - 102).

The Abbasid caliphs continued to spend large sums of money in this manner. Every caliph who ascended the throne tried to excel his predecessors in the matter of extravagance till the turn of Muhtada came. He was a devout person, but he was not destined to live long, for he was killed by his own kinsmen.

The ministers too did not lag behind in the matter of extravagance. Mutawakkil's minister Fateh bin Khaqan built such lofty palaces that their minarets appeared to touch the sky. The poet Behtri says: "The minarets which are as lofty as the sky appear like the plumage of white pigeons flying in the space".

The minister Ibn Maqla had collected so many wild animals and birds in his palace that it is not possible for a government treasury to bear their expenses.

The minister Ibn Furat owned vast tracts of land and possessed enormous wealth. He took his meals with crystal spoons. He used one such spoon for one morsel and did not use it again. More than thirty spoons were placed on his dining-table.

The minister Mohlabi was fond of flowers. A person who had seen him says: "Red roses worth one thousand dinars were purchased for Mohlabi in three days. The same were strewn in his assembly and in the spacious pool of his palace. Strange fountains had been built in the pool. The flowers were thrown into the pool and the fountains scattered them in the assembly of Mohlabi where they fell on the heads of those present. When the assembly dispersed the flowers were looted by the people".

A thick silken cloth called Thiyab al-Na`al used to be purchased for the shoes of the mother of the caliph Muqtadir. Same silk was used for the upper part and the sole of the shoes, and they were joined by means of melted musk and ambergris. The queen-mother did not use these shoes for more than ten days. Thereafter the servants appropriated them, extracted the musk and ambergris and utilized them.

The ministers and high officials also endeavoured not to lag behind the caliph in the matter of pomp and wealth.

Ali bin Ahmad Razi the Governor of Jundishapur, Sus, and Mazaria left behind, on his death, gold, silver, pearls, precious stones and other articles which were so costly that if they had been distributed among the poor all of them would have become rich. Moreover, he left behind so many eunuchs and black and white slaves that if they had been sent in the capacity of an army to some country they would have conquered it.

The quantity of wealth possessed by other governors can be guessed from what has been stated above about the wealth of Ali bin Ahmad Razi. The rich merchants also lived a luxurious life. The lives of poor people depended on the will of the caliph, his chamberlains and ministers. They were safe and secure only so long as the persons at the helm of affairs were not displeased with them.

Where did the affluent persons get all this wealth from? What reply can be given to this question except that they accumulated all these riches by exploiting the common people, who were reduced to penury and helplessness? A most cruel system was adopted to realize government taxes and to collect wealth. The caliph and his ministers and agents sold the entire land revenue and other taxes to a single person. That person paid a few millions of dirhams or dinars into the government treasury and then realised as much money from the people on account of taxes as he liked. This was like the system introduced by the Turkish Sultans in the Islamic countries which were ruled by them.

The Justice Department, too, was topsy turvy. The dignitaries of the state constantly interfered with the working of the courts and no judge could dare give a judgment against the wishes of the rulers.

Bribery was rampant. The indigence of the people was on the increase and their difficulties and afflictions were multiplying. So much so that if a person died, he deserved congratulations rather than condolences.

Ibn Luknak of Barah says: We are witnessing strange vicissitudes. If we were to see in a dream what we see while awake we would wake up in a state of distress”.

He prays to God that He may grant Job's patience to the people. He himself cries for them like Jacob and says: “The people are so much afflicted that when one of them dies he deserves to be congratulated”.

He adds: “By God we are caught in the clutches of cruel and oppressive time and pray to the Almighty to grant us Job's patience. The world has become devoid of its beauty. So cry like Jacob”.

The wise, learned and distinguished persons about whom Ali had made recommendations to his sons Hasan and Husayn (for the guidance of the people) that they should associate with them, hear their words carefully and recognise their status. He had also instructed the governors to consult and honour them as they are light amongst the Muslims and shall remain till the world lasts. They were in an enviable condition during the Abbasid period, except those who had sold themselves to the rulers.

Abu Hayyan who was a great scholar and author of many valuable books says in his book entitled *Al-Amta` wal Mawanisah*: “I have been obliged to sell my faith and compassion and to resort to hypocrisy and to do such indecent deeds that no gentleman may like to record them”.

He got so much fed up with the world during the last days of his life and was so disappointed with the government of the time that he burned up all his books.

Abu Ali Qali was also compelled to sell his books which were his dearest capital. He says: “For twenty years these books were a source of solace for me and I was immensely grieved when I had to sell them. I had never thought of selling them even though I might have had to remain in prison continuously on account of my being in debt. However, owing to indigence and with a view to feed my small children I was obliged to sell these books”.

Khateeb Tabrizi had a copy of Azhar's book entitled *`Tehzib-al-lughat'* which was in many volumes. He wished to hear its contents from an expert and to investigate them. The people advised him to contact Abu'l `Ala Muarri. He put the book in a sack and proceeded to Muarratu'l No`man on foot carrying the sack on his back as he did not have enough money to hire a conveyance. During the journey he perspired so much that all the volumes of the book were spoiled. Complaining against adversity he says: “Others may get tired of journeying but I am tired of standing. In Iraq I had to live among people who are mean and the descendants of mean persons”.

Complaining against the unsound judgment of time and its maltreatment of noble-minded person Ibn Lunak of Basrah says: “O time! You have made the noble persons wear the dress of humiliation and abjectness. I do not consider you to be `time'. You are paralysis. How can anyone expect anything good

from you when you consider ability and perfection to be a shame. What is the reality of your condition as we see it? Is it insanity, shamelessness or impudence?”

During the entire period of the Abbasids ³ the people remained divided in two groups. One of them was that of the rich and the other of the poor. Both the groups suffered from numerous moral evils according to their respective environments. Moral degradation prevailed to the same extent during the last days of their rule as in the beginning. Rather it was at a higher level.

The rich led a life of luxury and pleasure and indulged in unlimited debauchery. As regards the poor enmity, envy, falsehood and deceit were rampant among them. Owing to indigence the people resorted too much to asceticism and mysticism. It was not, however, the mysticism, which emanates from good morals and from considering the world to be transient. It was the mysticism which is the consequence of helplessness, failure and despair.

Owing to indigence many other bad habits like love for magic, jugglery, and superstition, developed in the people. This was because when a person fails to earn his livelihood by honest means he resorts to foul means.

The governments which were established after the decline of the Abbasid empire had more class differences and their moral degradation was more dreadful. From the time when the hand of the oppressor (Ibn Muljim) was stretched towards Imam Ali son of Abu Talib and that supporter and defender of human rights was martyred, these calamities became the fate of the Arabs and befell them constantly in new forms.

In short the people of the East were permanently subjected to these sufferings and hardship.

¹. Islam permits enslaving of only infidels deserving to be fought with, or prisoners who are captured as a consequence of jihad. During the period of the caliphs and thereafter, however, the conditions became such that whenever the ruffians found any unprotected person in an Islamic city they caught and sold him.

². Islam does not permit enslaving a Muslim or a Zimmi or a non-believer with whom a pact has been concluded. It so happened, however, that during this period most of the slaves and slave-girls belonged to these categories.

³. No doubt, most of the Abbasid caliphs led lives of luxury and pleasure and were ill reputed on account of their having oppressed their subjects. However, there were a few amongst them who were just. Some of them promoted literature and industry and worked for public welfare in many ways. They constructed many observatories the like of which were not known to the Romans and the Greeks. They also established big hospitals and trained doctors and scholars. All these facts are recorded in the pages of history.

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