

Murderers of Uthman

The brief account which we have given of the nature and habits of Bani Umayyah and the descendants of Ali and their respective supporters shows clearly that love for authority and sovereignty, and egotism and selfishness had taken deep roots in the hearts of Bani Umayyah, and their followers, who possessed habits and nature similar to their masters were also as ambitious as them.

As we have stated earlier Bani Umayyah and their supporters opposed the Prophet and Islam, because they possessed the mentality of the chiefs of Quraysh who could not tolerate that Islam should restrain them from their evil acts and destroy their social laws which were no doubt beneficial for the traders and the rich persons, but were death warrants for the poor and the helpless.

From the day on which the Prophet announced his appointment to the prophetic mission till the conquest of Mecca the chiefs and dignitaries among Quraysh had embraced Islam but the hopes and objects of each of them were different. The events show that these persons can be divided into three categories as detailed below:

Firstly there were persons who considered Islam to be a true religion and embraced it willingly. Their number amongst the chiefs of Quraysh was the smallest.

Secondly there were those who were watching as to which of the two parties – the Muslims and Quraysh was going to succeed. They wanted to join the successful party. To this category belonged Amr Aas. We shall explain later the circumstances in which he embraced Islam.

Thirdly there were persons who embraced Islam reluctantly. They had lost their dignity and honourable position and had joined the ranks of the Muslims with the intention of replacing Islam by ignorance as soon as an opportunity arose. To this category of the chiefs and elders of Quraysh belonged Mu`awiya's father Abu Sufyan bin Harb and those tribal chiefs who became apostates immediately after the death of the Prophet.

The chiefs and elders of Quraysh who belonged to the first category remained steadfast in their faith but their Islam was unconsciously mixed up with their sentiment of belonging to high families.

As regards the persons belonging to the other two categories the pivot of their politics was only the economic aspect and its social aggression. The chiefs of Quraysh belonging to these categories united for their personal advantages. If their interests were common they helped one another but if they were divergent they worked separately.

The responsibility for corruption and mischief devolves on the chiefs belonging to all the three categories although the chiefs belonging to the last two categories had a larger hand in it. They did not wish to miss any opportunity of gaining wealth and money and did not care as to how many responsibilities rested in those days on the shoulders of the Muslims in connection with the promotion of Islam. Signs of love for wealth and profit had begun appearing from beginning of the period of the caliphate of Abu Bakr.

An evidence of this is the incident of Khalid bin Walid and the harsh words exchanged in that connection by Abu Bakr and Umar. The story in short is that Khalid killed Malik bin Nuwaira cruelly and unjustly to acquire booty, and outraged the modesty of his wife, who was very beautiful. When the news reached Abu Bakr he was astonished and also felt grieved and uttered this well-known sentence. "War booty has made the Arabs greedy and Khalid has disobeyed my orders".

When Khalid came to see Abu Bakr he had three arrows in his turban. When Umar saw him he said: "O enemy of God! All these acts of yours are hypocritical. By God if I gain control over you I shall stone you to death". He then pulled the arrows from Khalid's turban and broke them. Khalid could not pick up courage to say anything as he was under the impression that Umar was acting in accordance with the instructions of Abu Bakr.

Later Khalid saw Abu Bakr and put up excuses before him. Abu Bakr believed him and accepted his excuses. When Umar came to know about this he incited Abu Bakr against Khalid and suggested that Khalid must be punished for killing Malik. Abu Bakr said: "O Umar! You had better keep quiet. Khalid is not the first person who has committed a mistake in the matter of interpretation (of law)".

During the days of Umar the distinguished persons of Quraysh also coveted worldly gains and there are innumerable instances which go to prove this fact. The best proofs of it are the verses which a poet composed and sent to Umar. In those verses it had been said that in some cities and provinces the distinguished persons and dignitaries misappropriated public property and took care that he (Umar) should not come to know about it. It was added that the people were very much distressed owing to this exploitation.

The poet says: "When they determine we also determine. When they perform jihad we also perform jihad. Then where have they acquired wealth from, while we are empty-handed?"

When an Indian trader brings musk it is found flowing in the hands of these dignitaries. Obtain God's property from whomever you can. These persons will remain satisfied even if you let them retain half of their wealth".

Umar ordered some of these persons not to leave their places or residences and dismissed others from

their posts. He also made some of them render accounts of their earnings and confiscated their wealth.

Uthman gave complete freedom to the dignitaries and the curbs which had been imposed by Umar on their greed were removed. These dignitaries became victorious under the leadership of Bani Umayyah which appeared at one time and disappeared at another. The result was that the people had to suffer great hardships and the dignitaries indulged in such nefarious activities as had never been observed during the time of Prophet or during that of Abu Bakr and Umar

It will not be out of place to mention here what Ali said about Uthman and Bani Umayyah before Uthman became caliph. He had said to his uncle Abbas: "I am sure the Quraysh will make Uthman occupy the caliphate, and Uthman will introduce innovations. If he lives I shall remind you of these words of mine and if he is killed or dies Bani Umayyah will keep the rulership revolve around themselves". How true the prediction of Imam Ali proved in the matter of Uthman!

When Uthman occupied the caliphate he had to face problems which were very intricate. Bani Umayyah, instead of assisting Uthman in solving them, made them more complicated. Furthermore, they took as much advantage of Uthman's mildness as they could, and based their policies on family bias, personal influence and authority and disregard for public welfare. Utilizing all resources of governmental authority they reserved all posts and positions for themselves and converted the Islamic system of government into a pure capitalistic system and the caliphate into kingship. All resources of the State became the monopoly of their friends and slaves.

Immediately on assuming the caliphate Uthman began making the people subservient to Bani Umayyah. He made Bani Umayyah rulers of all Islamic cities and provinces and gave them large tracts of land. He made the property of the Muslims a plaything for the wealthy, and openly supported the capitalist class which had been crushed by Islam earlier. The result was that the dignitaries and powerful persons grew much richer and the common men became their slaves.

We narrate below a few instances which will go to show what position Bani Umayyah enjoyed during the days of Uthman and how the state had become a plaything in their hands.

Uthman gave one-fifth of the war booty received from the conquest of African countries to his cousin Marwan bin Hakam. This innovation was resented very much by the people! Abdur Rahman bin Hanbal representing the views of the public says: "I swear by God that God has not left anything in vain, but you O Uthman have created a mischief for us. It is a test for you or maybe a test for us".

Fadak, which had in fact been inherited by Fatima, was given by Uthman to Marwan. Uthman also gave him one hundred thousand dirhams out of the public treasury. The Umayyad – Abdullah bin Khalid bin Usayd requested him for assistance and he gave him one hundred thousand dirhams, although there was no justification for such extravagance. He was especially kind to Hakam bin Aas who was a sworn enemy of Islam, and the Prophet had expelled him from Madina. Uthman gave him one hundred thousand dirhams.

There was a bazaar named Mehzool in Madina which was endowed by the Prophet upon the Muslims. Uthman gave it away to Harth bin Hakam.

There were around Madina pasturages, which had been declared by the Prophet to be the common land for grazing the animals belonging to all Muslims. Uthman snatched away those pasturages from the Muslims and reserved them exclusively for Bani Umayyah. From then onwards only the camels belonging to Bani Umayyah could graze there.

The entire amount of taxes received from the African region i.e. from Egypt to Tangiers was given by him to Abdullah Bani Sarah. The day on which he gave one hundred thousand dirhams to Marwan bin Hakam, he also gave two hundred thousand dirhams to Abu Sufyan bin Harb. Upon this Zaid bin Arqam, the treasurer, came to Uthman and, with tears in his eyes, threw the keys of the Public Treasury before him. Uthman said: "Why are you weeping? I have shown regard to these persons on account of our kinship". Zaid said: "Even if you had given one hundred dirhams to Marwan it would have been too much, but you have given him one hundred thousand dirhams!" Uthman said: "Let the keys remain here. It will be possible for me to find many treasurers".

A large quantity of wealth was received from Iraq. The whole amount was distributed by Uthman amongst Bani Umayyah. When he gave his daughter Ayesha in marriage to Harth bin Hakam he gave him one hundred thousand dirhams besides what he had already given him. He also gave Harth a large number of camels which were received from various Islamic countries. He also deputed him to collect zakat from the tribe of Qaza`ah and gave him the entire amount collected by him. It was three million dirhams. (Sharh Nahjul-Balaghah, Vol. 1, p.98).

Once some distinguished companions who were headed by Ali met Uthman and had a talk with him about Harth. Uthman said: "He is my near relative". The companions said; "Did Abu Bakr and Umar not have near relatives? Why didn't they bestow favours on them?" Uthman replied: "Abu Bakr and Umar sought recompense from God by keeping their relatives deprived, whereas I seek recompense from God by bestowing favours on them". The companions said: "We prefer their conduct to yours".

Uthman did many such things as encouraged the persons in position to accumulate wealth by unlawful means. He left the influential persons free to do whatever they liked; rather he made matters easy for them so that they might become participants in the crimes of Bani Umayyah and might not get any occasion to criticize their activities.

Talha bin Ubaidallah erected a lofty palace in Kufa which became known amongst the Arabs, after three centuries, as Dar al-Talhatain. As regards his income Mas`udi has said in *Murooj al-Zahab* that only from Iraq he received daily grains worth a thousand gold coins, rather more than that. An equivalent amount was received from Kanas. The income from Sirat and its suburbs was even larger. In Madina he built a magnificent palace which resembled that of Uthman.

Abdur Rahman bin Auf erected many large and spacious palaces and buildings. He had many stables

and in everyone of them one hundred horses were kept. He also owned one thousand camels and ten thousand goats. Besides all this wealth he had three million gold coins.

Zaid bin Thabit left behind so much gold that it had to be cut into pieces with an axe to be distributed among his heirs. Besides this he left behind a large quantity of other properties.

Laila bin Umayyah left behind half a million gold coins. Mas`udi writes about Zubayr bin Awam that during the time of Uthman he owned one thousand slaves and one thousand slave-girls. He built splendid palaces at various places like Basra, Kufa and Alexandria and owned fifty thousand gold coins in cash and one thousand horses.

After writing all this Mas`udi says: "It needs volumes to narrate how the wealth of the rich increased during the period of Uthman. This was not the position during the days of Umar.

The wealth of a person with whom Uthman and other Umayyads were pleased knew no bounds. The common people starved while the relatives and friends of Uthman rolled in wealth. They collected so much wealth that the people had never seen or heard of it. He himself was also very rich. At the time of his assassination his treasurer had one hundred and fifty thousand gold coins and thousands of dirhams. He had property worth about one hundred thousand dirhams in the valley of Qura' and Hunayn. He also possessed innumerable camels and horses (vide the book entitled '*Uthman*' written by Sadiq Arjun, printed in Egypt).

Jewels and ornaments of the Iranian emperors which were acquired as war booty during the time of Umar were kept in the Public Treasury. During the time of Uthman, however, they were seen shining on the bodies of the daughters of Uthman. The people saw with their own eyes their rights being trampled upon. The persons in authority ridiculed the poor subjects who could not dare say anything in reply.

Mas`udi says about Uthman in *Murooj al-Zahab*: "Uthman was very prodigal. His governors and other persons also followed his example. Uthman built in Madina, a palace, whose doors were of teak wood. He also acquired large properties, gardens and springs in Madina.

Uthman gave an open licence to Bani Umayyah to appoint or remove the officers. They accumulated wealth and created zones of influence and authority for perpetuation of their rule. The source of all these evils was Marwan bin Hakam who was appointed by Uthman as his minister. Uthman followed his advice in all matters.

Similarily Uthman divided the people financially into two classes. One class consisted of the officers and relatives of Uthman who rolled in wealth and committed all sorts of atrocities, and the other class belonged to the common people who were deprived and helpless.

Previously the practice was that the revenue which was collected from a certain city or province was spent in the first instance to assist the needy persons belonging to those very places and the surplus

amount was sent to the capital, so that the caliph might spend it on the needy persons there. Uthman ordered that the entire amount should be sent to the capital. The self-seekers took much advantage of this change in policy”.

Dr. Taha Husayn says: “The first trouble which arose on account of this practice was that capitalism spread in Iraq and other provinces on a large scale. This practice benefited those who were big capitalists and could purchase the property of the persons belonging to less privileged class. Thus Talha and Marwan bin Hakam purchased large properties. From then onwards began the practice of purchase and sale, mortgage, lease etc. not only in Hijaz and Iraq but also in other Arab countries and conquered areas, and the large estates came into existence. In the circumstances all sorts of people got engaged in making money as a result of which a class of rich rulers came into existence. It was more distinguished than the class which possessed ancestral estates.

The second trouble which arose was that the persons who purchased properties in the Arab cities in general and in Hijaz in particular endeavoured to gain maximum profit from their lands. They purchased a large number of slaves. Very soon Hijaz was like a paradise. Thus a class of landlords came into existence in cities like Madina and Ta'if. They did not work themselves, and spent their time in merry-making, and the entire work was done by their slaves. All the affairs of these masters were managed by their servants. These masters were in fact the slaves and the slaves were the real masters. On the other side there were the bedouin who were deprived of all amenities of life. They did not possess any land in Hijaz which they might sell to purchase land in Iraq and they did not also have any land in Iraq which they might sell to purchase land in Hijaz.

These actions, resorted to by Uthman of his own, or on the suggestion of his advisers, produced very evil political and social results.

The political result was that only a few persons became the owners of enormous wealth. Every capitalist drew the people towards himself by means of his wealth, organized a group of his adherents and began thinking of becoming a ruler. Such persons endeavoured to take advantage of the disunity of the people.

From the social point of view the people got divided into various classes. To one class belonged the persons who were wealthy and enjoyed influence and authority and to the other class belonged the poor and the helpless. Persons belonging to the former class had big estates and slaves and servants who worked for them on their lands and rendered other services. In between these two classes was the middle class. Those who belonged to this class lived in far off cities. They attacked the enemies and defended the frontiers. The lives and property of the people were safe because of this class.

The rich persons made these middle class people their tools. They created dissensions among them and divided them into various groups. The history of the Muslims shows that dissensions first appeared among the affluent persons. In the first instance the capitalists opposed one another, and later differences appeared between the middle class people and the rich people. As regards the third class

those belonging to it served the rich and worked on their lands. Apparently they did not wield any influence in the society and did not take part in the dissensions of others. Their differences appeared at a later stage. (*Al-Fitnatu'l Kubra*, Vol. 1, `Uthman|p. 105 – 109).

Till that time the Arabs were not accustomed to class distinctions and none had been seen enjoying a distinctive position or receiving special gifts without proper justification. It had also not happened till that time that the welfare of particular persons should have been given priority over the welfare of the masses. The character of the Prophet, his justice and generosity were deeply imprinted on their minds. They were habituated to the government which was the government of the people and not of a few persons, the government of justice and not of tyranny – the government which shared the woes of the people and not the one which created disorder and chaos.

When Uthman succeeded Umar as caliph and adopted the policies mentioned above the people were greatly perturbed. They complained against these policies to Uthman time and again and also expressed disgust against the Umayyad governors and officers who followed those policies. At times it so happened that Uthman felt ashamed on account of the malpractices of the Umayyad rulers, heard the complainants patiently and promised to remove the corrupt officers. Soon afterwards, however, those officers prevailed upon Uthman and continued to occupy their positions, indulged in greater malpractices and ruthlessly took revenge on their opponents.

Very often the Arabs approached Uthman in the form of deputations and complained against the Umayyad officers. Uthman promised them that their grievances would be redressed. However, when they returned to their home-towns, the governors and officers concerned put their leaders to death. Those who escaped punishment went to Madina again and complained to the distinguished companions of the Prophet. The companions approached Uthman and supported the cause of the complainants. Uthman issued orders dismissing the oppressive ruler and appointing a new one in his place. However, before the new nominee proceeded to his place of duty a messenger was sent to the dismissed ruler with a letter containing instructions that the new appointee as well as the persons who had approached the caliph in the form of a deputation should be put to death as soon as they arrived. Consequently the old ruler remained at his post and carried out the orders of the caliph meticulously and became more violent in his oppression.

These were the policies which Uthman adopted on the advice of influential persons to ensure their welfare and safeguard their interests. The common people were subjected to great oppression during his period. Some times they remained silent and at other times they opposed and criticized the regime openly. Some poets have drawn very true pictures of the capitalists of that time.

There were some magnanimous persons also in the society, who possessed enlightened minds and speaking tongues and enjoyed great respect among the Muslims. They were also extremely frightened like other persons on account of the prevailing conditions. However, they strongly opposed the plutocracy of Bani Umayyah and the policies adopted by Uthman and his associates. Their opposition

was, nevertheless, based on principles and without any bad intentions whatsoever. Their objections were quite sensible and free from personal bias.

We shall see later how cruelly these well-intentioned, truthful and pious critics were dealt with.

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