

Revolt against Ali

Silence prevailed in Madina for many days after the assassination of Uthman. The residents of Madina, the Muhajirs and the Ansar, as well as those persons who had arrived there from other places were on the look-out for a new caliph. The Egyptians specially insisted that Ali should become the caliph but he declined to accept this office. During this struggle of insistence and refusal he addressed the people and said inter alia: “Leave me and find out someone else for this caliphate. If you leave me alone my position will be the same as yours. In that event it is possible that I may be more attentive and submissive to the ruler whom you choose than you are. It is better (from the point of view of your material interests) that I should be an adviser rather than a ruler”.

He continued refusing to accept the caliphate till the entire population of Madina gathered at his door and insisted that he should accept the office. The crowd was so huge that he feared some of them might be trampled upon by others. All of them were saying with one voice: “We cannot find anyone more deserving of this office than you, and we do not choose any other caliph. Kindly accept our oath of allegiance. Thereafter there will be no differences or grouping among us”.

Malik Ashtar Nakhai's held Ali's hand in his own hand and took the oath of allegiance and all others also followed suit. Every one of them was saying: “None except Ali is fit for the caliphate”.

Every person was repeating the name of Ali and all were filled with joy. They were happy because they knew that they had taken oath of allegiance to a person who knew their needs and recognized their rights and was sincere, learned and wise, and was like a father to them. They were happy that Ali had accepted the caliphate. As they had suffered great hardships for a long time during the dark Umayyad rule, they had pinned high hopes on him.

The Commander of the Faithful himself draws a picture of the oath of allegiance taken to him by the people in these words: “The people were so happy when the oath of allegiance was taken to me that the children began to rejoice, the old men came forward with trembling legs to take the oath, those who were unwell also managed to come somehow, and even the young girls came out of seclusion”.

When Ali mounted the pulpit on the first Friday those who had not been able to take the oath of

allegiance earlier did so on that day. On that day Talha was the first to take the oath and he was followed by Zubayr. They were the same Talha and Zubayr who said later: "When we took the oath of allegiance to Ali the conditions were such that a sword was hanging on our necks".

It may very well be asked as to what Talha and Zubayr meant by saying this. It may be said in this connection that this was not the view of Talha and Zubayr only but the majority of Quraysh had similar ideas about the caliphate of Ali.

They did not like Ali's caliphate on account of envy, or because they feared that Ali would not allow them the power and authority to which they had become accustomed, and would not tolerate their making unlawful gains. They knew that he did not consider it permissible to be improperly kind to incompetent persons or to give money to undeserving persons. He could not waste the property of the Public Treasury which was meant for the needy and the poor.

Now consider the fact that all the persons of dignity and rank among them were desirous of attaining to the caliphate. Ali has mentioned in unambiguous terms the grudge which Talha and Zubayr and other Quraysh nursed against him in their hearts. He says: "What relation do I have with Quraysh? In the past I had to fight against them on account of their infidelity, and now I shall have to fight against them because of their being rebellious. For them I am the same today as I was yesterday".

The majority of Quraysh disliked Ali and many of them rebelled and conspired against him. The foremost of his opponents among Quraysh were Talha and Zubayr. These persons could not, however, avoid taking oath of allegiance to Ali because the inhabitants of all Arab and non-Arab conquered lands and especially the Egyptians were not prepared to accept any other persons as caliph. It was only Ali who possessed the qualities which the opponents of Uthman wanted to see in their ruler.

Talha and Zubayr were the two great rivals of Ali in the matter of the caliphate. They were most keen to attain to this office. However, none of the attributes which the opponents of Uthman wanted to see in their caliph were found in them. Both of them were just like Uthman, and those things which made the people revolt against him were present in them. They were dying for power and authority. In the foregoing pages we have already quoted Uthman as saying about Talha: "May Talha be cursed! I gave him so much gold and still he wants to take my life".

The people were fully aware of these things in the aspirants to the caliphate and had no doubt about their unsuitability for that office. That is why all of them inclined towards Ali and compelled Talha and Zubayr also to take the oath of allegiance to him. (We have already discussed in detail under the caption '**Hazrat Amir al-Mo'mineen**' part III), whether Talha and Zubayr took oath of allegiance to Ali willingly or unwillingly and have also quoted the verdict of the Egyptian scholar Dr. Taha Husayn that both of them took the oath voluntarily with the hope that Ali would make them his partners in the affairs of the caliphate but when he declined to fulfil their wishes they broke the oath and joined Ayesha, saying that the oath was obtained from them under duress.

As regards their taking the oath of allegiance to Ali and then breaking it and revolting against him Ali says:

“These two entered the allegiance with the faces of the sinners and went out of it with the faces of the disbelievers”. (It means that whereas other people took the oath of allegiance to Ali so that the matters might be set right but these two did not take the oath with that object in mind and when they broke the oath it was mere unfaithfulness and treachery with Ali's creed which was based on truth and justice).

From the very first day Ali assumed the reins of the caliphate he became busy making reforms. He removed the oppressive and unjust governors and officers from their offices and started investigations regarding the wealth taken by various persons unlawfully from the Public Treasury. In taking these steps he did not care for the enmity of those who were opposed to him and to the reforms which he intended to introduce.

During the period of his caliphate Imam Ali had to face very difficult situation. All the influential persons had united against him. Same was the case with the self-seekers whose number was very large. Ali decided to fight on both the fronts. He decided to establish justice and destroy oppression. He also decided to establish a government based on true economic, social and moral values. And he fought on these two fronts with bravery and steadfastness which was unparalleled and unusual. He made a firm resolve that he would remove all darkneses and that his knowledge like the rays of the sun will illuminate all the corners of the globe.

As soon as the people elected Ali as their leader to reform the society Bani Umayyah and their friends in Madina and other cities collected their wealth and arms and went underground. Later, as soon as they got an opportunity, they went away to Mecca, where they could indulge in subversive activities against Ali's government, and instigate the people to revolt against him, and if they did not meet success there they could also go to Syria and join Mu`awiya. If these people had thought of public welfare and had not coveted the caliphate it was not at all necessary for them to make all this planning.

However, they indulged in such activities with the hope that they would regain the caliphate and if they were successful in removing Ali from their path this office would never slip off their hands. Futhermore, they had accumulated fabulous wealth during the days of Uthman and this also prompted them to go beyond the reach of the just caliph, because they could utilize this wealth to strengthen themselves for the achievement of the objective.

Ali was not unaware of the plan of Bani Umayyah. He knew with what object they had run away with their wealth and arms. He, therefore, imposed restrictions on their leaving Madina so that they might not become a danger to the new government.

During these difficult circumstances some companions of the prophet, including Talha and Zubayr, came to see the Commander of the Faithful and said: “We took the oath of allegiance on the condition that penal laws would be enforced. You should, therefore, punish those persons who revolted against

Uthman”.

Ali replied to them: “Dear brethren! As you are aware I am not unmindful of this matter. However, the question is whether I possess sufficient strength to achieve this purpose. At present the insurgents are very powerful. It is they who dominate us (at present) and not we who dominate them. Furthermore, your slaves and the desert Arabs have also joined them and they are in a position to do you every harm. In the circumstances is there any possibility of achieving what you desire?” All of them replied in the negative. Ali then continued: “I swear by God that I do not think as you do. When this matter is discussed the people will have different views about it. Some of them will have the same view which you have, whereas others will have a view opposed to yours. And there will be still others who will be neutral. You should, therefore, wait till the conditions settle down, the people get peace of mind and it becomes easy to acquire rights. So far as I am concerned you should rest satisfied and await my orders. It is only then that you should come to me”.

These persons had come to see Ali with doubts in their minds regarding his government and its attitude towards the people. He, however, gave them a reply which changed their doubts into certainty. They had laid down a condition for his holding the office of caliph that he should punish those persons over whom neither he nor they themselves had any control. Their own slaves and the desert-Arabs were among the opponents and murderers of Uthman.

He gave them such a convincing reply that they had to acknowledge that he had a better knowledge of the conditions than they had, he was making greater efforts to improve the matters, and he understood the delicacy of the situation better than they did. Unfortunately, however, these persons were oblivious of the reality which the Commander of the Faithful had perceived very clearly and while it was necessary to remain patient, they wanted him to take a hasty action.

These persons were under the wrong impression that all the Muslims viewed the murder of Uthman alike, and considered that his blood must be avenged. However, as Ali had a better knowledge of the situation than they had, he removed their misunderstanding by saying that if the question of punishing Uthman's murderers was taken up at that stage the opinions of the people on the issue would be divided.

Those people had come to Ali with their sentiments, desires and personal aims. However, Ali faced them with arguments and logic. Instead of addressing him as *'Amir al-Mo'mineen'* (Commander of the Faithful) they said: “O Ali!” The harshness and boldness of these words are quite apparent whereas the word brethren used by Ali for them carried the sense of love and affection.

They came in connection with the claim of revenge for the murder of Uthman, although many of them were themselves responsible for his murder. However, in reply to their demand Ali displayed the unparalleled forgiveness which was inherent in his nature.

Ali began keeping Quraysh under strict observation lest they might create disturbance. Of course, this

action on his part was perfectly correct and based on farsightedness and prudence.

Ali began removing Uthman's governors from office one by one. There was no question of retaining any of them and dismissing others because they were all alike in the matter of corruption, oppression and disrespect for the Islamic law. It was because of oppression and corruption that unrest took place in various parts of the Islamic territories as a consequence of which Uthman had to lose his life. Ali did not agree to allow these people to continue in their offices even for a short period of time because truth and falsehood cannot go together and tyranny injustice and corruption cannot be eliminated unless the root-cause of these evils is removed.

Ibn Abbas and many others suggested to Ali to allow the former governors to occupy their position till his government was firmly established but he did not agree to resort to political contrivances or to strengthen his government by pleasing the self-seekers. He, on the contrary, relied upon his responsibilities, reason and sword, and remained steadfast in his determination to eradicate all evils.

Syria was his greatest worry. We have already mentioned in the forgoing pages the opinion which Ali held about Mu`awiya. He decided to remove Mu`awiya from the governorship, and Mu`awiya was adamant that he would not take oath of allegiance to him. One day Ziad bin Hanzala met Ali to find out what decision he had taken about Mu`awiya so that he might inform the people about it.

Imam Ali said to Ziad: "O Ziad! Get ready". Ziad asked: "O Commander of the Faithful! For what should I get ready?" Ali replied: "To mobilize the forces to attack Syria". Ziad said: "O Commander of the Faithful! It will be better to be mild and forbearing". Thereupon Ali recited a verse which meant: "You will become free from injustice only when a mind with quick understanding, a sharp sword, and a nose possessing sense of honour combine".

Ali started making preparation to advance against Syria and punish Mu`awiya. On observing his enthusiasm the people also became active and got ready to support him. However, there were also some persons who were bent upon opposing him and Talha and Zubayr belonged to this group. They came to see him and said: "O Commander of the Faithful! Permit us to go to Mecca and perform **Umra**. If you are still here till we have performed the **Umra** ceremonies we shall return and join you. And in case you accompany us we will follow you".

Ali looked at their faces for sometime and then said: "Your real purpose is not to perform Umra, but to commit treachery against me. However, you may go wherever you like". Talha and Zubayr then left for Mecca.

Bani Umayyah, Talha and Zubayr combined to conspire against Ali. They practised every kind of deception and fraud and spent money lavishly to turn the people against him. The governors who were appointed by Uthman, and had been removed by Ali helped these persons in every manner. They had already shifted their wealth and arms to Mecca which was now their headquarters. Ayesha, daughter of Abu Bakr and wife of the prophet was busy making preparations for war against Ali from the day she

received information about his being chosen as caliph. How she received this news and what her reaction was can very well be assessed from the incident narrated below.

Allamah Tabari says that when returning from Mecca Ayesha reached a place named `Sarf'. She met a man named Abd ibn Umm Kilab who was a relative of hers from her mother's side. She enquired from him about the conditions prevailing in Madina. The following conversation took place between them:

Abd ibn Umm Kilab: The people killed Uthman and then waited for eight days.

Ayesha: What did they do then?

Abd ibn Umm Kilab: The entire population of Madina found a way out unanimously. All of them agreed to Ali becoming the caliph.

Ayesha: If what you say is true I wish that the sky may fall on the earth. Take me back. Take me back.

Ayesha was going from Mecca to Madina after performing Hajj. However, when she heard about Ali having become the caliph she immediately returned to Mecca saying: "Uthman has been killed unjustly. By God I shall avenge his murder".

Abd ibn Umm Kilab: What is all this? I swear by God that you were the foremost in accusing him. You used to say: "Kill Na`sal. He has become an infidel".

Ayesha: The people killed him after he had repented. I did utter these words but what I am saying now is better than what I had said earlier.

Abd ibn Umm Kilab: O Mother of the Faithful: It is a very lame excuse.

Here Tabari has quoted some verses of Abd ibn Umm Kilab, who has thrown the entire responsibility for the murder of Uthman on Ayesha. He says: "It was you who took the initiative. The changes were brought about by you, and all the trouble started from your side. You ordered us to kill Uthman. You said that he had become an infidel. We obeyed you and killed him. We hold the view that Uthman's murderer is the person who ordered that he should be killed. Neither the sky fell upon us nor were the sun and the moon eclipsed". (Tarikh Tabari, Vol. 5, p. 140).

Ayesha returned to Mecca and was engrossed in her own thoughts. When she reached Mecca Talha met her. He told her how Ali became caliph and what the people did with him (i.e. with Talha). He said: "The people took the oath of allegiance to Ali and then came to me and pressed me so hard that I, too, had to take the oath".

Ayesha said: "How can Ali exercise control over us? So long as his government exists in Madina I shall not return to that city".

From that moment onwards she started a mischievous movement against Ali. She began instigating the people to avenge the murder of Uthman and kill Ali.

On scrutinizing the attitude adopted by Ayesha at this juncture one can very well realize the grudge she had been nursing against Ali in her heart. To understand this attitude of hers it is necessary to know the reasons for her enmity against Ali.

Ayesha's hatred and enmity against Ali was very old, and according to many historians it commenced from the very day on which she entered the Prophet's house as his wife. One great reason for her enmity against him was that he was the husband of Fatima. Fatima was the daughter of Khadijah and Khadijah was the lady who was highly esteemed by the Prophet during her life as well as after her death for her sincerity, magnanimity, and excellent morals and manners. In spite of all her best efforts Ayesha could not make the Prophet forget Khadijah. In this connection the following extract from the magazine 'Al-Azhar' which is the organ of Al-Azhar University deserves consideration:

“Besides other qualities which Ayesha possessed she was very courageous and was keen to attain the highest degree of greatness She was not contented with the superior position which she enjoyed in the heart of the Prophet vis-a-vis his other wives, but wished to find a place in his heart equal to that of lady Khadijah, the first truthful one, whom he loved most. The Prophet was never tired of talking about lady Khadijah and praising her. It was on account of her that he also showed consideration to the women, who had been her friends. With all her attributes and accomplishments Ayesha made vain efforts to make the Prophet believe that God had given him a better wife than lady Khadijah. She ought to have acknowledged the superiority of Khadijah and should have realized that it was useless to contend with the Prophet on account of the wife who was the greatest amongst all the noble and distinguished women, was the most truthful one, and was the first to embrace Islam. This jealousy of Ayesha did no harm to Khadijah. On the contrary it made her greatness known to the entire world and gave her a lasting fame”. (The Magazine Al-Azhar May 1956).

Ayesha herself says: “I never felt as much jealous of any other wife of the Prophet as of Khadijah, although I had not even seen her. The Prophet talked about her every now and then. At times he slaughtered the sheep and sent pieces of meat to her friends as presents. I told him many times that (from the manner in which he talked about Khadijah) it appeared that there was none else in the world except Khadijah. He, however, replied that she had such qualities and she also bore him children”.

Thus Ayesha admits that the Prophet preferred Khadijah to all his other wives and this made Ayesha jealous of her. And naturally enough as this extreme love of the Prophet for Khadijah, was the cause of Ayesha's jealousy against her. She also felt jealous of Fatima and also hated her husband Ali and her sons Hasan and Husayn.

Another reason for Ayesha's nursing grudge against Ali was the suggestion made by Ali to the Prophet at the time of the incident called Ifk (false accusation). On that occasion he had said: “O Prophet of God! There is no scarcity of women for you. You can marry many other women besides Ayesha”.

Furthermore, it is also a fact that Ayesha was confident that after Uthman was murdered the caliphate

would return to her own family (i.e. Bani Tayim) and Talha would become the caliph. We have already mentioned before, how happy she felt on hearing the news of the assassination of Uthman, hoping that Talha must have been chosen as the caliph in his place.

Immediately on her arrival in Mecca Ayesha began recruiting an army to fight against Ali and his government. Her open enmity with Ali strengthened the hands of Bani Umayyah as well as those of Talha, Zubayr and their supporters. All were united on the issue of waging war against Ali. At this juncture the members of the Umayyah family had gone underground in Hijaz etc. On Ali's having become caliph they reappeared. They tried to make the maximum profit from the revolt of Quraysh against Ali. They joined hands with Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, and placed at their disposal the wealth which they had grabbed during the period of Uthman; so that they might utilize it to make preparations for war, and the government of Ali might be nipped in the bud. They left the places where they were hidden and reached Mecca to assist Ayesha.

The stand taken by them was that Uthman had been killed unjustly and as Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr had risen to avenge his murder it was necessary to support them. Mu`awiya considered the situation very favourable to him.

However, his interests differed from those of Talha and Zubayr because each one of them aspired to become the caliph. Mu`awiya wished that Talha and Zubayr should fight with Ali, because as a result of the clash one party was sure to be defeated and the party that won would also become weak and it would be easy for him (Mu`awiya) to subdue it.

It was due to her own personality and because of being the wife of the Prophet that Ayesha was able to mobilize a very large army in Mecca. However, when the army was ready differences arose between Talha, Zubayr etc. as to where they should proceed and what the next step should be.

If the activities and affairs of the persons who were acting as the leaders of this gathering are scrutinized and an effort is made to find out their motives for mobilizing such a large army the real position will become clear. It will then become known that they had not gathered to avenge the murder of Uthman, as claimed by them, nor for correcting the prevailing conditions, which according to them, Ali had not been able to do, nor for any other thing about which they talked in their speeches to instigate the people to revolt against Ali. In fact they had aims and objects different from one another.

If one of them was against Ali, because, on account of him, he could not attain to the caliphate, another had joined this gathering on account of some old grudge against the new caliph and still another wanted to regain the lost glory and power of his family which was not possible in the presence of Ali in the capacity of caliph.

Ayesha was of the view that the army should march towards Madina so that the capital might be conquered before Ali was in a position to defend it, and his caliphate brought to an end. Some others suggested that they should go to Syria which was a safe place. Bani Umayyah, however, opposed this

suggestion. They were of the view that the security of a region in which they were already firmly established should not be endangered. They knew very well that Mu`awiya had been ruling Syria for a long time and the people were obedient to him.

They did not, therefore, wish that Syria should become the theatre of war. Furthermore, Bani Umayyah considered Syria to be their last resort in case they were defeated by Ali and they did not, therefore, consider it in their interest to create problems for Mu`awiya, who was busy establishing a kingdom there, and to make it a battle field.

Talha and Zubayr rejected the idea of going either to Madina or to Syria and suggested that they should go to Basra, because they had a large number of supporters in Kufa and Basra. By suggesting that they should proceed to Basra, Talha and Zubayr had a deep plan in their mind. They knew that if they succeeded against Ali with the help of the people of Kufa and Basra one of them would be chosen as caliph, because the caliphate would naturally go to a person whose supporters were more in number.

The Umayyads also supported this suggestion. All of them, therefore, went to Ayesha and said to her: "O Mother of the Faithful! You had better abandon the idea of going to Madina, because the people with us will not be able to fight against the insurgents successfully. You should, therefore, accompany us to Basra. It is possible that the people of that place may disagree with us and put forward the excuse that oath of allegiance to Ali has already been accomplished. In that event you should prepare them to avenge the murder of Uthman in the same manner in which you have prepared the people of Mecca for this purpose".

Bani Umayyah spent large sums of money for the procurement of war equipment. A public announcer made the following announcement in the streets of Mecca: "The Mother of the Faithful Ayesha, Talha, and Zubayr are proceeding to Basra. Whoever sympathises with Islam, desires its glory, and wants to fight against the enemies and avenge the murder of Uthman, should accompany them. If a person has no animal of riding and other necessary equipment, he should take it from them".

When Ayesha had mobilized the army and was ready to depart for Basra, Umm Salamah, another wife of the Prophet, met her and remonstrated with her. She said: "Till recently you used to instigate the people to revolt against Uthman, and spoke ill of him. You did not call him with any name other than Na`thal".

Then she insisted upon Ayesha that she should stay at home and not lead an army against Ali. However, when she realized that Ayesha was bent upon waging war against Ali she sent her son Umar bin Abi Salamah to Ali with a letter which read as follows: "O Commander of the Faithful! If it had not amounted to disobeying God and if I had not also been sure that you would not like my accompanying you, I would have accompanied you in this battle. I am sending my son Umar. I swear by God that he is more dear to me than my own life. He will remain with you and will participate in every battle on your side".

Ayesha also invited other wives of the Prophet to accompany her to Basra. All of them, except Hafsa daughter of Umar, declined to accede to her request. Hafsa got ready to join her to fight against Ali. However, her brother Abdullah bin Umar prevented her from doing so saying: "You must stay in like other wives of the Prophet". Hafsa, therefore, sent a message to Ayesha to excuse her as her brother was not agreeable to the proposal.

The entire army proceeded to Basra under the command of Ayesha. When they reached Khaybar, Ayesha, Talha, Zubayr and Marwan met Sa'id bin Aas and Mughayrah bin Sho'ba. We have already reproduced their conversation in the foregoing pages.

Then according to the general plan of Bani Umayyah Sa'id bin Aas endeavoured to divide these people and make them fight with one another so that by doing so they might lose their strength and the government should revert to Bani Umayyah. He, therefore, conversed privately with Talha and Zubayr as follows:

Sa'id: Tell me solemnly, whom will you make caliph if you are successful?

Talha and Zubayr: Whosoever from among us two is chosen by the people.

Sa'id: No. You should give this office to one of the sons of Uthman, because it is his murder which you propose to avenge.

Talha and Zubayr: Pooh! Should we elevate a youngster to this position in the presence of so many distinguished persons?

Sa'id: Of course, then I must endeavour that the caliphate should not go out of the hands of the descendants of Abd Munaf.

Marwan also tried time and again, like Sa'id bin Aas, to divide these people. He did so with the machinations which were the best specimens of fraud and deceit.

Imam Ali also came to know that a large army had proceeded from Mecca to Basra on the pretext of taking revenge on the murderers of Uthman. He was very much disturbed on account of the differences and dissensions between the Muslims. It also pained him that owing to these differences and dissensions it would not be possible to continue and accomplish the reformatory program introduced by him, because following the example of these rebels others would also be encouraged to revolt and various governors appointed by Uthman might also follow in the footsteps of Mu'awiya and refuse to acknowledge the authority of the central government.

As soon as he heard this news he gathered the people of Madina, and addressed them in these words: "Almighty God has promised forgiveness for the unjust of this nation and success and salvation for those who are obedient and firm. Only that person who cannot bear truth resorts to falsehood. You should know that Talha, Zubayr and the Mother of the Faithful Ayesha have combined against my government and caliphate and have invited the people towards reformation. So long as I do not feel any danger from them to you and myself I shall remain patient and so long as they withhold their hands, I, too, shall

withhold mine. And I am contenting myself with the news about them which I have received so far”.

Imam Ali considered it necessary to nip the mischief in the bud and to stop the Meccans on the way before they should reach Madina, because this was the best way of avoiding disturbance and bloodshed. He, therefore, appointed Sahl bin Hanif as his representative in Madina and proceeded to Mecca along with the army which he had previously collected to attack Syria.

On the way many persons belonging to Kufa and Basra also joined him. When Ali reached Rabazah along with his army he came to know that Zubayr and Talha had left Mecca and had already crossed Rabazah on their way to Basra. He stayed in Rabazah for a few days and made necessary preparations. In the meantime he made all possible efforts that the conditions which had deteriorated on account of the activities of Talha, Zubayr and Ayesha might improve.

He, therefore, sent a letter to Ayesha saying: “You have disobeyed God and His Prophet by stepping out of your house. You are aspiring something with which you do not have the least concern. You also claim that you want to reform the people. Will you please tell me as to what women have to do with the command of the armies? You also claim that you want to avenge the murder of Uthman.

Now Uthman was an Umayyad whereas you are a woman of the tribe of Taym Bani Murrah. I swear by God that the crime of those who have tempted you into adopting this course of action and made you disobey God and His Prophet is much greater and more dreadful than that of the murderers of Uthman. You did not become indignant yourself but you were made indignant. You did not get excited yourself but other persons have been instrumental in exciting you. Ayesha! Fear God and return to your house and remain indoors. Good wishes to you”.

Ali wanted to treat Ayesha as excusable in the matter of her revolting and commanding an army. That is why he said: “You have not become indignant yourself but you have been made indignant, and you did not get excited yourself but other persons have been instrumental in exciting you”. The regard for the sentiments of women and the respect for Ayesha which this sentence contains is evident. By saying that she was disobedient at others behest he also provided her a path for dissociating herself from revolt and mischief.

He held at fault those people who had incited her to be disobedient and made her leave her house. He also declared their action to be a much greater and dreadful sin than that of the murderers of Uthman. In the end he advised her to fear God and return to her house, because only in that case peace could be restored in the country and the people would also have liked such a development.

Ayesha did not, however, pay any heed to Ali's advice. She stuck to the decision already taken by her. In reply to the letter of Ali the Commander of the Faithful, she wrote only one sentence which, though brief, indicates fully the personal enmity and the grudge which she nursed against Ali in her heart. She wrote: “O son of Abu Talib! No room is now left for reconciliation. We shall never submit to you. You may do whatever you like. And peace (be upon you)”. Talha and Zubayr too, sent him similar replies.

When Ayesha's army reached near Basra the commanders held consultations as to whether or not they should enter the city. They knew very well that the number of the supporters of Ali in Basra was not small. Hence they considered it expedient to hold mutual consultations and to correspond with the people of Basra to find out to what extent they were faithful to Ali. Eventually it was decided that before entering the city the elders and distinguished persons should be instigated to rise against Ali and efforts should be made to win their sympathies. Talha and Zubayr, therefore, wrote a letter to the judge Ka`b bin Soor saying: "You are a distinguished person of Basra and a chief of the Yemenites and were appointed as judge by the caliph Umar. You were angry with Uthman on account of the injustice done by him to you. Now you should be angry with those who murdered Uthman".

Ka`b bin Soor wrote back in reply: "If Uthman was killed because of his being unjust why are you anxious to avenge his murder, and how does he deserve that his murder should be avenged? And if he was killed without justification there are others who deserve more than you to take revenge on the murderers. And if the matter of Uthman was difficult for those who were present at the time of his murder it is more difficult for those who were not then present".

These two (i.e. Talha and Zubayr) wrote a letter to Manzar bin Jarood also which read as follows: "Your father was the head of your tribe during the age of ignorance and also a chief in Islam. Your position vis-a-vis your father is the same which a horse which stands second in a horse race enjoys as compared with a horse which stands first. Uthman has been killed by people who are inferior to you, and those people who have become angry on account of the murder of Uthman are better than you And peace (be upon you)".

Manzar bin Jarood said in reply: "I shall associate with the righteous persons only if I can remain better than the evil-doers. Uthman's right was as much essential and mandatory yesterday as it is today. He was among you but you left him undefended and did not help him. When have you made this new discovery and how has this new idea occurred to you?"

Ayesha wrote a letter to Zaid bin Sauhan on these lines: "From Ayesha, daughter of Abu Bakr, Mother of the Faithful and the beloved wife of the Prophet to her sincere son Zaid bin Sauhan.

"Rush to my help immediately on receiving this letter of mine and even if you do not come restrain the people from supporting Ali".

Zaid bin Sauhan wrote in reply: "I am, no doubt, your sincere son, provided you dissociate yourself from this affair and return to your house. Otherwise I shall be the foremost among your opponents".

In `Iqd al-Farid, Jamhra Rasail al-Arab and Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah of Ibn Abi al-Hadid the reply of Zaid bin Sauhan has been quoted in these words: "Peace be upon you. Almighty God has given you one order and has given us another. You have been ordered not to leave your house and we have been ordered to fight so that evil may be suppressed. You have, however, abandoned what you were ordered to do and are restraining us from doing what we have been ordered to do. Your wishes will not be

complied with and your letters will not be replied to. And peace (be upon you)”.

Bani Umayyah did not write letters to their supporters openly like Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr. They conducted secret correspondence with those, who, as they expected, would be ready to oppose Ali and assist them in pulling down the edifice of his caliphate. This secret correspondence fully explains their psychological condition. If these people rose to avenge the murder of Uthman it was not necessary for them to contact their individual supporters secretly, and in case they had revolted against Ali only to assist Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, even then it was not necessary for them to consider their own affairs separately from others. The fact is that all their efforts were directed towards creating favourable conditions for themselves and they contacted only those persons about whose support they had no doubt in their minds. That is why their correspondence was usually secret.

When the commanders of Ayesha's army were carrying on correspondence with the people of Basra, the son of Abu Sufyan, sitting in Damascus, was watching the conditions of all those who had revolted against Ali as well as of those who had declined to fight against him. He had made separate assessment in regard to both the parties and also knew the fate which both of them were destined to meet. It was his earnest desire that Talha and Zubayr should weaken Ali's government by fighting against him. It was only then that he could convert the Islamic government into Umayyad dynasty because he knew that as regards other Bani Umayyah none of them was as powerful and influential as he himself was.

Mu`awiya began instigating secretly every person to revolt against Ali particularly those who were not already opposed to him. He was well aware that as soon as Ayesha, Talha, Zubayr and other ring-leaders of their army were successful in gaining a victory, they would start fighting with each other. All this contention and mobilization of forces against Ali was only for the sake of the caliphate. After his defeat Talha and Zubayr were bound to quarrel with each other to become caliph, and then Mu`awiya, whose strength had been safe throughout, could very well step in and grab the caliphate,

Mu`awiya wrote a letter to Sa`d bin Abi Waqas saying: “It was incumbent upon the members of the consultative council to assist Uthman because it was they who had elected him as caliph. Talha and Zubayr assisted him, (by claiming revenge for his murder). Both of them were the members of the council like you, and the importance which you enjoy in Islam is also enjoyed by them. The Mother of the Faithful Ayesha has also decided to assist Uthman. Hence you should not dislike the thing which they have liked and should not reject that which they have accepted”.

It can very well be observed how dexterously an effort was made to instigate Sa`d bin Waqas (who was one of the candidates for the caliphate nominated by Umar) to revolt against Ali without disclosing the real object. However, Sa`d bin Abi Waqas sensed the deceit and was not trapped. After all he too was one of Quraysh and was fully aware of machination which Bani Umayyah always employed to achieve their ends.

He, therefore, sent Mu`awiya a blunt reply which he must not have expected. He (Sa`d) praised Ali for

his virtues and attainments and declared that none else could equal him. He also told Mu`awiya that the intention with which he was instigating the people to revolt against Ali was known to him and it was obviously that he wanted to attain to the caliphate. He, however, added that all his efforts in this behalf were useless because it was not permissible for a man like him (Mu`awiya) to hold that office.

He wrote: "Umar nominated to the consultative council only those persons, who were eligible to become caliph. None of us had a prior right to that office vis-a-vis others except that we might have selected one of us as the caliph. Of course Ali possessed all the qualities which we possessed, but he also possessed some special attributes which none of us possessed. As regards Talha and Zubayr it would have been better for them to stay at home. And as regards the Mother of the Faithful may God forgive her". This reply sent by Sa`d to Mu`awiya clearly shows what views Sa`d held about those who had risen to fight against Ali and create mischief in the land.

The letters, which were exchanged between the people of the camel and the citizens of Basra and also between the citizens of other cities, some of whom were the supporters of the people of the camel and others were not, make it clear that the people were fully aware of the causes of the disturbance. They also manifested the personality of Ali. It also becomes known that the righteous persons loved Ali very much and considered his words and deeds to be true and correct.

Another important thing also becomes known and that is that the supporters of Ali tried their level best to prevent the people of the camel from creating mischief and disorder and to act according to wisdom and reason. This shows that they thought and spoke on the same lines on which Ali did. Ali had impressed upon them with his words and deeds that creating disturbance and disorder is a satanic action and peace and tranquillity is the best thing. Hence, the attitude adopted by him before as well as after assuming the office of caliph keeping in view the exigencies of time was considered by them to be absolutely correct.

One could very well ask: What did these people of the camel want Ali to do when his newly-formed government was not yet fully established? What action of Ali could they dislike when they had displayed great enmity with him and started inciting people to revolt against him immediately on hearing the news of his selection as caliph? Why were they annoyed with him when they could not face his rational arguments? And how could they treat him to be responsible for Uthman's murder when they themselves were his murderers?

These questions were asked by the supporters of Ali time and again in their correspondence with the people of the camel. Furthermore the representatives of the citizens of Basra who came to see them also asked them these questions again and again When Ayesha's army had not yet reached the surroundings of Basra, and the persons carrying the letters written by her and Talha and Zubayr to the people of Basra were still on their way, Uthman bin Hanif sent Abu'l Aswad Du'ali and Imran bin Hasin to Ayesha to find out from her as to why she had revolted against Ali and to advise her to refrain from pursuing the object with which she had come out from her house.

He then sent a deputation to Talha and Zubayr also with the same purpose but they repeated what they had been saying and tried to enter Basra forcibly. However, Uthman bin Hanif could not tolerate their entry into the city. He collected the people, equipped them with arms and proceeded to the quarter called Marbad where Ayesha's army had encamped.

When the two armies stood face to face with each other Talha stepped forward and delivered a speech. Standing between them he praised God and then spoke about Uthman. He enumerated his virtues, stated how he was murdered unjustly and asked the people to avenge his murder after peace was restored. Then Zubayr stood up and delivered a similar speech. After both of them had spoken, their supporters said from his right hand side: "Whatever you have said is true". However, the people with Uthman bin Hanif said from the left side: "Whatever you have said is wrong. You took oath of allegiance to Ali and then violated it and formed a front against him". This resulted in an uproar and everyone started shouting.

Then Ayesha stood up to speak. She said: "The people criticized Uthman and found faults with his officers. They used to come to Madina and consulted us. When we pondered over the complaints of the people against Uthman we found him to be innocent, pious and truthful, and those, who created disturbance, to be sinners and liars. They had something else in their hearts. When their numbers increased they entered into Uthman's house without any justification, for he was not at fault, and shed the blood which it was not lawful to shed. They looted the property unlawfully and desecrated the land which they were duty bound to respect".

The people of Basra got annoyed and interrupted her speech by making a noise. She, however, cried: "O people! Keep quiet". Thereupon the people became silent. Continuing her speech she said: "Of course, the Commander of the Faithful Uthman did make innovations but he continued to wash his lapses with repentance till he was slaughtered unjustly like a camel. You can see that Quraysh shot arrows on the targets and wounded their own faces. They gained nothing by killing Uthman and they did not also pursue the policy of moderation. I swear by God that they will have to face very violent afflictions – afflictions which will awaken those who are asleep and make those who are sitting stand up. And they will be dominated by a people who will not take pity on them and will subject them to the severest torture".

"Look here! Uthman has been killed unjustly. Find out his murderers and when you have them in your grip kill them. Then let the consultative council take a decision regarding the selection of a caliph. The members of the council should be the same as were nominated by the Commander of the Faithful Umar, with the exception of that person who may have participated in the murder of Uthman. You have taken oath of allegiance to Ali ibn Abi Talib under coercion and sentimentally without consulting the nation".

Ayesha thus began instigating the people to assassinate Ali. She said that the oath of allegiance taken to Ali had been taken under coercion and sentimentally without consulting the nation. She added that Ali deserved to be killed as he had taken part in the murder of Uthman and on that score it was necessary

to select a new caliph through the committee constituted by Umar of which Ali could no longer be a member.

The hearers were bewildered to hear the speech of Ayesha. Many of them including Ahnaf bin Qais and Jariyah bin Qadamah Sa`di asked her some very incisive questions. When she finished her speech Jariyah said to her: "O Mother of the Faithful! I swear by God that Uthman's murder is not at all important as compared with the dreadful situation that a personality like yourself should step out of her house to fight against the Muslims.

You have torn the veil which God had provided you, and have violated the sanctity which He had ordained. You should just reflect that whoever decides to fight against you will certainly also intend to kill you. In case, therefore you have accompanied this army voluntarily you had better return to Madina and if they have brought you forcibly you should seek help against them from the public. I shall then be with you".

Talha and Zubayr were also asked many questions by various persons, to whom they could not reply. Prolonged debate took place but without any result except that Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr got very much annoyed and became more determined to fight.

Ayesha herself was the Supreme Commander of her army and she commanded it mounting on a camel. It was for this reason that the battle fought at Basra came to be known as the Battle of the Camel. She appointed the junior commanders and wrote letters in her own name to those persons who were expected to help her. We have already reproduced above one of her letters addressed to Zaid son of Sauhan.

Ayesha's letters were mostly of this kind: "From Ummul Mo'mineen Ayesha daughter of Abi Bakr, to such and such of his sons: "As soon as you receive this letter you should get up and come to help me and if you are unable to come to my help, you should at least prevent people siding with Ali". Many persons responded to her call and there were also many who declined to follow her.

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