

Selection of the Leader

The researchers complain that a factual, analytical and critical study of the struggle between Imam Hasan (as) and Muawiya, as presented by history, has not yet been undertaken. Thus, a chapter on the early Islamic period remains dark, vague and unclear. A similar view has been expressed by the well known German orientalist J. Wellhausen. While analysing the period of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as), he writes:

Events are recorded with confusion and fragmentation and that it is, therefore, difficult to place certain details of the episode in precise chronological order." [1](#) [1](#)

The researchers are justified in their comment, as those trying to analyse the events during the period of Imam Hasan (as) come across many such different, confused statements about the events and contradictory narrations. Similar variation is also observed about the leadership of the vanguard brigade. From the occurrences after reaching Maskin, it seems that the difference is quite significant.

Rebuttal of another Misunderstanding

Some historians have written that the command of the vanguard brigade that Imam Hasan (as) had ordered to go to Maskin in the northern Iraqi area to check the advance by Muawiya, was given to Qais b. S'ad b. Abadah Ansari. The following historians have recorded it as such: [2](#) [2](#)

Ibn. Atham – 'Al-Futuh',

Hafiz Dhahabi – 'Tarikh al-Islam-o-al-'abar,

Dayar Bakri – 'Tarikh al-Khamis',

Ibn. Hajar 'Asqalani – 'Al Isabah fi Tamyiz al Sahaba'

Ibn. Khaldun – 'Tarikh Ibn. Khaldun'

Abu 'Ali Maskuya – 'Tajarib al Ummum'

Two versions have been given in 'Tarikh al-Tabari'. According to Zuhri's narration, Ubaidullah b. Abbas, the cousin of Imam Al-Mujtaba's father (i.e. his uncle) was in command of the vanguard brigade, while according to Musa b. Abdel Rahman's narration, the command was given to Qais b. S'ad.[3](#) [3](#)

The historian Ibn. 'Asakir too, in his well known book 'Tarikhe Madinate Damishq' mentions two different versions. According to him, only Abul Safar has mentioned the name of Qais b. S'ad as the commander of the vanguard unit, while others have mentioned Ubaidullah b. Abbas as the commander.[4](#)

On the other hand, we also come across the historical records wherein it has been mentioned that though the leadership was given by Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) to Ubaidullah b. Abbas, Qais b. S'ad was appointed as his assistant and adviser. The following historians support this version:

Yaqubi – 'Tarikh al-Yaqubi'

Ibn. Kathir – 'Al bidayah wal Nihayah'

Baladhuri – 'Ansab al Ashraf'

Abul Faraj – 'Maqatil al Talibin'

Sheikh Mufid – 'Kitab al Irshad'

Ibn. Abi al Hadid – 'Sharh al-Nahjul Balaghah'

Ibn. Athir – 'Al Kamil fit Tarikh'

From the historical evidence available, it is not difficult to decide that initially the commander of the vanguard unit was Ubaidullah b. Abbas, but later the command was officially assigned to Qais b. S'ad. We will quote only two sources here:

(1) The war command of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) in which he ordered Ubaidullah to take the command of the vanguard brigade and appointed Qais b. S'ad and S'eed b. Qais as his advisers.

(2) The letter from Ubaidullah b. Abbas or Qais b. S'ad to Imam Hasan (as), after taking over the command of the vanguard brigade, in which they have mentioned the crisis faced by the leadership. [5](#)

From a historical point of view, the authenticity of the two documents and their accuracy is proved. However, the misunderstanding by some that Qais was the commander of the vanguard brigade was due to the main role played by Qais b. S'ad. For sure, during the caliphate of Hazrat 'Ali (as) he had been the commander-in-chief of a very important brigade 'the Shurta al Khamis' (the Thursday Soldiers).

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) had also not appointed Ubaidullah b. Abbas as the sole commander, but he had appointed Qais as his assistant and next in command. Due to later events, when Qais got the command, he was at the centre of all the events, which caused the historians to consider him as the commander of the vanguard brigade.

Some historians have raised objection that Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) appointed Ubaidullah as the commander. In this respect, the following extract from 'Tarikh al-Tabari' etc., needs attention:

"When Hazrat 'Ali (as) was martyred and the Iraqi people paid allegiance to Imam Hasan (as) as the caliph, it became evident that Imam Hasan (as) was not in favour of war. But he wanted to make a

bargain for himself with Muawiya before making any agreement. Imam Hasan (as) knew that Qais b. S'ad would not agree with this view of the Imam (as). Therefore, he dismissed him and appointed Ubaidullah b. Abbas as the commander of the army." [6](#)

Two conclusions can be drawn from the above historical extract: 1) Imam Hasan (as) did not want a war (2) Before taking any decision about the consequences of peace, he wanted to extract something from Muawiya.

As far as the stand taken by Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) about the war is concerned, we have already explained it in earlier chapters and no doubt remains about the same. Yet, we would like to make a brief comment.

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as), just like his father, considered it his prime duty to fight the rebellious group and he considered himself to be the rightful claimant and heir to the caliphate, but due to a number of problems, which have earlier been mentioned, he did not want to start the war himself in the given disturbed conditions. But that did not mean that he did not want to fight even a defensive war!

That is why, as soon as he got the information about Muawiya's advance, he made the declaration of war and started large scale propagation for the same. His sermon in the Kufa mosque about readiness for war and his taking the limited army to the camp in 'Nakhaila' outside the city, the same day, is a clear proof that he was taking appropriate steps for war.

Reliable historical records show that it was not Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) but the people who were reluctant to fight and disappointed their Imam. If Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) was really inclined towards peace from the beginning, he would neither have threatened Muawiya with the consequences nor would have stuck to his firm stand till the end. Rather, he could have easily replied to Muawiya's offer of peace at some appropriate moment and would have presented him with his own conditions! [7](#)

Moreover, the above extract was from Zuhri's narration and it reflected his own ideas. Researchers complain that he was partial. We will discuss this aspect in detail in subsequent chapters. Similarly, we will reply to the second conclusion referred to above, while discussing the 'peace treaty'.

Some historians, prominent among them being Ibn. Kathir, have written that Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) was against the war but the views of the supporters of war and the Iraqi people prevailed over his own view they gathered a large number of people after which the grandson of the Holy Prophet (saws) had to decide in favour of war. [8](#)

There is no doubt that the religious devotees and the supporters of war had tried to pressurize the Imam (as) right from the beginning for war and had wanted the allegiance to him to be paid on the condition that he would consider the war against the rebels as the main goal of his caliphate. But the true Islamic caliph had turned it down and allowed them to pay allegiance only on following the Holy Book and the Sunnah.

The historians have no doubt that ultimately the extremist group as well had agreed to the Imam (as)'s firm and rightful stand and gave allegiance on that basis. As they could not prevail over the Imam (as) at that critical moment, it was impossible for them to prevail over the Imam (as) after he had duly taken over as the caliph.

The reliable historical records show that the decision for defensive war was taken by Imam Al-Mujtaba (as). The religious group had supported him in this regard which was appreciated by the Imam (as) and he had prayed to the Gracious God to bestow His blessings on them. This shows that on this issue there was no difference of opinion between him and the religious group.

The basic question that remains, and the answer to which would put an end to all objections and misunderstandings, is: on what considerations did Imam Hasan (as) appoint Ubaidullah as the commander of the vanguard brigade when persons like Qais b. S'ad b. Abadah Ansari were present in the army, whose military experience, sincerity towards the Ahlul Bayt (as), and honesty had already been tried?

The learned scholar Razi Ale Yasin (RA), through a comprehensive analysis, gives four answers to this question:

Scholar Raazi Aale Yasin's analysis about the leader's selection

First answer

The scholar Razi Ale Yasin writes that when Imam Hasan (as) wanted to select Ubaidullah for the leadership, he had bound him down to consult Qais b. S'ad and S'eed b. Qais. This is clearly stated in his war command or the agreement. This way he did not allow the leadership to be confined to one person, which would not be prudent, but appointed a supreme committee of three persons who were the most capable persons in the army.

If he had given preference to Qais b. S'ad over the other two, or over other companions, and had confined the leadership to one person, it was likely that other persons like him who had similar status, were sincere and had a shining record in the religious war ('jihad') and otherwise, would feel jealous.

Among those were Hazrat Aboo Ayub Ansari, Hujr b. Adi Kandi, Adi b. Hatim Tai and some others. In such a situation, it was the best policy for Imam Hasan (as) to prefer the cousin of his father, who was also the cousin of the Holy Prophet (saws), and to bind him to consult Qais b. S'ad and S'eed b. Qais. In this approach there was no danger of any rivalry or disagreement.

The Second Reply

The scholar Sheikh Razi, giving the second reply, writes that in the circumstances it was necessary for Imam Hasan (as) that the selected leader be from the Hashemi family. The point may be explained thus:

after the declaration of war in Kufa, the people had shown reluctance and half-heartedness which was the beginning of a bad omen for Imam Hasan (as).

So, it was essential for him to adopt such a policy which would provide a good answer to any current or future criticism or objection. It was easy for the people to blame Imam Hasan (as) if they would see any weakness in his army or would notice any lack of fighting spirit in the soldiers.

It is also possible that if the vanguard brigade had suffered defeat at the hands of Muawiya, they would have argued that if the commander was from the family of the Imam (as) he would have faced the adverse situation in a more determined, cool and calculated manner, and the result would not have been the same.

Therefore, taking all these factors into consideration, the selection of the Hashemi leader was an important and sane decision. No one in the army of Imam Hasan (as), neither Qais b. S'ad, nor S'eed b. Qais nor anyone else was more keen and determined to fight Muawiya, than Ubaidullah, as he was full of anger against Muawiya.

In fact he was burning with rage to take revenge from Muawiya, as two innocent children of his had fallen victim to the murder and plunder by the army which Muawiya had sent to Yemen under the command of Basar b. Abi Artat. This incident is one of the darkest in history and is very well known. So it was appropriate that the command of the vanguard brigade should be given to an aggrieved one who would be very determined to fight the murderer of his children.

The major part of the vanguard brigade which Imam Hasan (as) had formed to fight Muawiya, consisted of the remaining soldiers who had been organized by the leader of the faithful Hazrat 'Ali (as) to fight Muawiya. Hazrat 'Ali (as) had appointed Qais b. S'ad the commander of that army and Qais had been its leader all the time.

It would be a realistic assessment that such relation between the leader and his soldiers is significant and it is easy for a leader who has extraordinary influence over the soldiers to take independent decisions at any time by distancing the army under his command from the central command of the Imam (as).

This was such a delicate issue which required caution. Though we respect Qais, we cannot deny his personal inclination to take independent decisions. We cannot forget the day when he got the leadership and standing among the soldiers he gave them the choice to decide between two alternatives:

- (1) The peace of Imam (as) which included allegiance to Muawiya;
- (2) To continue the war without the specific order of the Imam (as).

There could be no better strategy than to not give the command to such a personality but to still keep him as a political and military adviser, thus benefiting from his ability and intelligence. So, in the given

conditions, Imam Hasan (as) made the best decision.

However, the appointment of Qais b. S'ad as the deputy commander by the Imam (as), does not contradict his political policy, as firstly, he would have to maintain the decisions taken by the earlier command, thus he would not be able to make quick changes to the war scene.

Secondly, it was likely that the Imam (as) would himself reach Maskin by that time and would take full control himself, as he had informed the commander that he intended to reach there very soon. After that, what was the problem in appointing Qais as the deputy commander?! [9](#)

- [1.](#) S.H.M. Jafari – 'The Origin and Early Development of Shia Islam', Qum, Ansarian Publications, p.137.
- [2.](#) . Ibn. Atham – 'Al Futuh, Hyderabad: Daira al Maa'rif al Usmania, 1971, vol. 4, p.154; Dayar Bakri – 'Tarikh al Khamis', Beirut, Muassasah Sh'aban, vol. 4 pp. 389–390; Ibn. Khaldun, 'Tarikh Ibn. Khaldun', Beirut, Muassasah A'la mi, 1971, vol. 2, p. 186; Abu 'Ali Maskuya – 'Tajarib al Ummum', Tehran, Dar Sarosh, 1987, vol. 1, p. 386; Hafiz Dhahabi, 'Tarikh Al Islam, Beirut, Darul Kutub al Arabi, 1987, 'Ahde Khulfae Rashidin', p.6; Ibn. Hajar Asqalani – 'Al Asabah fi Tamyiz al Sahaba; Egypt, Matb'a Mustafa Muhammad, 1939, vol. 1 p.329.
- [3.](#) Tabari – 'Tarikh al Tabari', Beirut: Darul Kutub al Ilmiah 1988, vol 3, p. 164–65.
- [4.](#) Abdul Qadir Badran, 'Tahzib Tarikhe Damishq al Kabir' Beirut, Darul Ahya al Turas, 1987, vol 4, p.223.
- [5.](#) Ibn. Abi al Hadid, 'Sharh al-Nahjul Balaghah', vol. 16, pp.22; Sheikh Mufid – 'Kitab al Irshad'vol. 2 p. 9; Ibn. Atham – 'Al Futuh, vol. 4, p. 157.
- [6.](#) Tabari – 'Tarikh al Tabari', vol 3, p. 165; Abu 'Ali Maskuya – 'Tajarib al Ummum', vol.1, p. 385.
- [7.](#) References have been quoted in the earlier chapters.
- [8.](#) Ibn. Kathir, 'Al bidayah wal Nihaya', vol.8, p.14; H.A.R.Gibb and Kramers, Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam: Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1974, p. 135.
- [9.](#) Razi Ale Yasin – 'Sulh-ul Hasan', Qum, Manshuraat al Shareef Razi, 1414 A.H., pp.108–111

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