

The Constituents of the Army and Its Quality

In the reliable historical records no detail is available through which we could ascertain the composition of various groups that constituted the army of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) and their quality. Occasionally it has been mentioned that Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) had taken the regiments to fight Muawiya who were the toughest and very firm, or that the Arab leaders had completely submitted themselves to the grandson of the Holy Prophet (saws) so that he had full liberty to fight anyone or make peace. [1](#)

We feel that these accounts are based on exaggeration as reliable historical records show so many facts which contradict these feelings. Basically, the army of Imam Hasan (as) was composed of the Iraqi army and their political, social and uncertain nature is reflected in the sermons of Hazrat 'Ali (as) as quoted in '*Nahjul Balaghah*' wherein he had indicated their weak and wavering nature.

Between the period of Hazrat 'Ali (as) and the peace of Imam Hasan (as), there is a maximum intervening period of ten months. During this period there was very little scope of any major changes in their nature. In this background we have some words spoken by Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) as well which serve as a shining guide for us. Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) has described the qualities of his army and has comprehensively compared the wars fought during the time of Hazrat 'Ali (as) and his own.

He says: "You were going towards Siffin when you were devoted to religion and the worldly benefits were insignificant for you, while today you are preferring worldly comforts over religion.

Be warned that you can be divided into two groups of the dead one the martyrs of Siffin over whom you are shedding tears or the dead of Nahrwan whose revenge you are keen to take. The others have run away from war. But those who are crying for the dead, they seem to be determined to fight." [2](#)

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) has, in a very fine manner, compared the Siffin war and the one fought during his time. In both these wars, on the one side was the rebellious Syrian group while on the other was the Iraqi army under the command of Islamic caliph.

The difference was that earlier the Iraqi army was fighting with such valour and determination that Muawiya had almost lost his senses, while now they had become victims of the enemy's intrigue and

were doubtful, rather afraid of the consequences of the war.

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as), explaining the different situation said that their success in the Siffin war was due to their religious leaning, sincerity and devotion, while the loss and their defeat in the war during his time was due to the absence of these very qualities. In other words, now they wanted personal and worldly benefits.

Now they were not fighting with the religious zeal and true spirit, but rather for their own worldly gain. Later, the grandson of the Holy Prophet (saws) referred to the two wars which had a profound effect on their destiny, i.e. the Siffin war, and the Nahrwan war.

So many other wars had also been fought but in these two wars they had suffered very heavy losses which could not be recompensed. They had not been able to overcome the negative effects of these wars, and particularly those of the Nahrwan war, as they were full of rage due to the feeling of enmity and the spirit of revenge.

Therefore, Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) considers them belonging to two different groups: one who was shedding tears on the loved ones who lost their life in the long and bloody Siffin war. This group was relatively better and, therefore, was ready to fight a defensive war along with Imam Al-Mujtaba (as). The other group either belonged to the very 'Khawarij' group or had sympathy with it.

Though they were involved in the conspiracy to assassinate Hazrat 'Ali (as), yet they wanted to take revenge from the worthy son of the leader of faithful Imam 'Ali (as) as well. About the rest, the Imam (as) said that they had kept away from war.

Sheikh Mufid is the first historian who, taking advantage of the above quoted words of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as), has clearly divided his army into different groups. The later historians have also written about this grouping. Briefly, the following five groups constituted the army of the noble Imam.

Shia

A particular class of people, devoted to Imam Hasan (as) and his illustrious father, having a special identity based on faith, thought, intellect and mystic knowledge. These people consider caliphate as the right of the household of the Holy Prophet (saws) ('Ahlul Bayt') from the very beginning, and obedience to them as obligatory.

There was no doubt about their asceticism, piety, faith, sincerity, honesty and devotion to 'Ahlul Bayt' (as) among these were well known and prominent personalities and the Companions of the Holy Prophet (saws) as well. No doubt, in asceticism, piety and faith, these persons presented an ideal and the Muslims used to seek religious knowledge and learning from them only.

But they were small in numbers as a large number from this group had been martyred in the unending

wars during the caliphate of Hazrat 'Ali (as). However, the remaining prominent personalities among them were still performing their duties honourably in the army of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) to the best of their ability.

They tried their best in inducing people to join the army, but it seems they could not change the thinking of the majority of the people of Kufa, and could not win their support. They remained faithful to the members of the household of the Holy Prophet (saws) even after the martyrdom of Imam Hasan (as) and some of them joined the revolution brought about by Imam Husayn (as) and attained martyrdom along with him.

The Supporters of Feudalism

The Arab society was based on tribalism. The war was also fought in accordance with the same system. The tribal chief would decide whether to fight or not to fight and the other members of the tribe had to follow him. One tribe, along with its chief would form a unit or a battalion. Islam was against this system of blind faith but it required a long time for the people to be educated, to acquire deep knowledge and to attain faith in the light of Islamic teachings.

It cannot be denied that during the time of Hazrat 'Ali (as) itself, many prominent tribal members had changed their loyalties. According to the historian Masudi, a majority of the wealthy persons of Iraq had negotiated with Muawiya, but their survival depended on outwardly supporting Hazrat 'Ali (as) in the war between him and Muawiya, while remaining neutral.

On many occasions, they openly opposed the leader of the faithful, thereby adversely affecting the war. During the time of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) these persons had started to support Muawiya more openly and their number had also increased.

Most of the army of Imam Hasan (as) was composed of such persons who would only accept the order of their tribal or party leader. In such circumstances, there was always a possibility that such leaders could force the majority of the army of Imam Husayn (as) to leave him at the slightest hint by Muawiya.

The Group of Self-Seekers

While discussing the history of Kufa, it was mentioned that many nationalities from different areas, belonging to different families, colours, breeds, religions and tribes had settled in Kufa. Due to its garrison status, a large number of persons had settled there who wanted to gain worldly benefits through war.

For them military ranks and booty were the main attraction and they were not concerned whether the war was being fought for a just cause or for falsehood. Although, apart from them, the whole army was inclined towards self-seeking and worldly benefits, yet a group of self-seekers existed in the army of

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) who had no love for religion or moral values.

Khawarij

Outwardly these people were pious and very respectable but the level of their intellect could be judged from the fact that, God forbid, they had slandered the leader of the faithful, Hazrat 'Ali (as) as being a polytheist, and had fought the war called 'Nahrwan' against him. Their number after their defeat in Nahrwan war could not be considered as large but their group constituted a great danger for Imam Hasan (as).

Outwardly, they were faithful to the Imam (as), but they were waiting for an opportune moment to attain their base objective. To kill Muawiya was also one of their aims. Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) had been watching them and was quite alert.

The Doubters

These people did not belong to any particular group or party. They did not have the ability to differentiate between the truth and falsehood and thereby to feel their responsibility to be on the right path. Moreover the extensive propaganda by the Khawarij and the Umayyad group had put them in doubt about the true path followed by the Ahlul Bayt (as) and about the prophethood.

In the normal conditions, they were with the army, but in an uncertain situation they could abandon the Imam (as), as they had an infirm faith.^{[3](#)}

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as)'s army was composed of these groups with varying tendencies. A majority of these people could become a source of danger for the Imam (as). Due to their wavering and depressed attitude, the revered Imam (as) had not decided to attack Muawiya. During his caliphate he was busy in reform in these disturbed conditions, but Muawiya, by starting the imposed war, had not given the opportunity for the same to the Imam (as).

He had to face Muawiya in war, who would have otherwise entered Iraq as victorious, would have at least imprisoned the Imam (as), and the fate of Muslims would have been at his mercy. The war was not only to protect the Islamic caliphate and rule but the survival of Iraq as an independent country was also at stake.

Therefore, he decided to fight a defensive war taking all the different groups in his army. Criticism has been levied on Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) regarding the composition of the army and the selection of the soldiers as well. But those indulging in criticism ignore the prevailing atmosphere, the society and the political conditions at the time.

So, the objections are wrong. There is no doubt that Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) was passing through a very trying period of Islamic history and not much reliance could be put on the army. However, like a capable

general, who had proved his capabilities in war during the period of his illustrious father, he took the decision to fight Muawiya with whatever army he had.

He formed a vanguard brigade of twelve thousand soldiers to stop Muawiya's advance. It was composed of very capable persons who included those devoted to him as well as the 'Shurta al Khamis' (the Thursday Soldiers' group) who had defeated Muawiya in the Siffin war. He had very carefully selected the leadership of the vanguard brigade and was with them, with a limited number of soldiers, till the march to Madain. There he stayed back, waiting for reinforcements from Kufa, Basra and Persia.

The success of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) depended on the performance of the vanguard brigade. It cannot be denied that in the vanguard brigade also there were paid agents of the enemy, but if its leadership had acted very tactfully according to his commands, it had the force and capability to inflict heavy physical and material loss to the Syrian army, thus blocking the advance by Muawiya, which would have forced him to change his policy.

Later, with reinforcements, the Imam (as) would reach Maskin and take control of the army himself, and the chances of his success would have been enhanced. Thus, at least Muawiya could have been confined to Syria. In such a situation, even enemies would have become friends.

But if the leadership of the vanguard brigade could not utilize the select army to the best of its ability and face crisis, then the enemy could penetrate and consequently the whole brigade would lose.

Due to its defeat, the whole plan would be upset, the agents of Muawiya and the spies would get the chance that they were awaiting, and the majority of the army would lose heart and leave the Imam (as) or cause a crisis for the central leadership. In such a situation, the malicious enemy like the Khawarij could get a chance to play some dirty trick.

¹ Hakim Naishapuri – 'Al Mustadrak 'Alal Sahihain', Beirut, Darul M'arifa, vol. 3, p. 170, 174; Dayar Bakri – 'Tarikh al Khamis', Beirut, Muassasah Sh'aban, vol. 2, p.390; Bukhari – 'Sahih Bukhari' Beirut, Darul M'arifah, vol. 2, 'Kitab al Sulh', p.114.

² Sheikh Mufid – 'Kitab al Irshad', Tehran, Intisharate 'Ilmiah, vol. 2, p.7; Baqar Qarshi – 'Hayat al Hasan bin 'Ali', Najaf, Matba al Ilmiah, vol.2, pp.52–55; Razi Ale Yasin – 'Sulh-ul Hasan', Qum, Manshuraat al Razi, pp.68–73, 126–136; Abdul Qadir Badran, 'Tahzib Tarikhe Damishq la Ibn. Asakir, Beirut, Dar Ahya al Turas, 1987, vol 4, p.225; Ibn. Khaldun, 'Tarikh Ibn. Khaldun', Beirut, 1971, vol. 2, p. 187; Hafiz Dhahabi, 'Tarikh Al Islam, Beirut, 1987, p.7.

³ 3. Sheikh Mufid – 'Kitab al Irshad', Tehran; Razi Ale Yasin – 'Sulh-ul Hasan', Qum, Manshuraat al Razi; Baqar Qarshi – 'Hayat al Hasan bin 'Ali', Najaf, Matba al Ilmiah, Masudi – 'Muravvij az Zaheb', Beirut, Darul Fikr, 1989, vol.2, p.430, Ibn. Sabbagh – 'al Fusul al Muhimmah', Najaf, Maktab Darul Kutub, p. 143.

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