

The divine will

Now we turn to the events which we had discontinued earlier. The group of persons who were annoyed with Ali (i.e. the Kharijites) left Kufa and settled in a nearby village called Harura. For this reason they are also called 'Haruriyah'. And as their slogan was "***La Hakam illallah***" (There is no judge except God), they are called '***Muhakkamah***' as well. However, their most well-known name is Kharijites.

Ali proceeded towards them along with his army. He, however, desired that no bloodshed should take place and they might be made to renew their allegiance to him and forsake their false belief by means of discussion. He, therefore, sent a message to them saying: "Send to me from amongst you the one, whom you consider to be most intelligent and judicious, so that he may argue with me. If he is able to convince me I shall do as you want me to. Otherwise you should renew your allegiance to me".

The Kharijites sent their leader Abdullah bin al-Kawa as their representative. Long discussions took place between him and the Commander of the Faithful. Ali gave satisfactory and convincing replies to all the questions asked by him. He went back to his friends, informed them about the matters which had come under discussion and told them that Ali had convinced him fully and he (i.e. Ali) was on the right.

The Kharijites, however, remained adamant and did not accept the advice of their leader. They said that as they had already declared Ali to be an infidel it was not possible for them to renew their allegiance to him. They accused Abdullah bin al-Kawa of having shown incompetence in arguing and proving his faith and asked him not to hold any further discussions with him nor disclose to anyone what he had already discussed with him. Thus they continued to be rebellious and inimical towards him and treated him and his companions as infidels and atheists.

Ali was very much grieved to find that his former friends and supporters had become his enemies and were not prepared to listen to reason. They were worldly minded people and were slaves to their carnal desires. He realized that only sword could settle the matters between them and himself. This had become necessary because those people had taken the law into their own hands. They killed those on whom they could lay their hands, and looted and plundered peaceful citizens.

Even then the Commander of the Faithful did not give up advising those people to come to the right

path. He also impressed upon his soldiers not to take the initiative in starting the battle. However, the Kharijites suddenly raised their slogan: "There is no judge except God" and attacked Ali's army with full force. Thereupon the Commander of the Faithful and his soldiers also drew their swords and the dreadful Battle of Nahrawan started. When fighting came to an end almost all the Kharijites were killed. Only four hundred persons survived, who had also sustained serious wounds. Had they not been half-dead owing to their wounds it was possible that they too might have died fighting, or would have gained victory. Ali ordered these persons to be dealt with kindness and handed over to their families and tribes, so that they might make arrangements for their proper treatment.

After having dealt with the Kharijites Ali desired to proceed to Syria to punish Mu`awiya. However, this time also Ash`ath bin Qais frustrated his plans by his deceitful activities. He made a large number of soldiers desert the army and hide themselves in adjoining cities. He argued that the soldiers had got tired of fighting for a long time and needed rest. He added that they would rejoin the army after they had taken rest and become fresh.

The Commander of the Faithful returned to Kufa to make preparation for attacking Syria.

Mu`awiya's own army was faithful to him and the Kharijites also helped him unconsciously by fighting against Ali. As regards Ash`ath bin Qais, the historians say that in his heart of hearts he was a supporter and sympathiser of Mu`awiya. Some historians have stated clearly that he went to Damascus, met Mu`awiya, obtained enormous wealth from him and began awaiting future developments.

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At this stage fate shot an arrow at Ali to which that great man fell victim and thereby his enemies achieved their object. However, this success of his enemies was not the result of their deceit, cleverness, wisdom, strength or prudence. It was a sheer chance and a sudden accident which paved the way for their success. Some fanatical Kharijites assembled at a place and began talking about their friends and kinsmen who were killed in the Battle of Nahrawan. They expressed the view that the responsibility for the bloodshed lay on the shoulders of three persons who were, according to their belief, the leaders of those who had deviated from the right path viz. Ali, Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas.

One of the Kharijites named Bark son of Abdullah undertook to kill Mu`awiya; another named Amr bin Bakr promised to do away with Amr ibn al-Aas; and a third named Abdur Rahman ibn Muljam took the responsibility of assassinating Ali.

The above-mentioned three Kharijites decided to kill Ali, Mu`awiya, and Amr ibn al-Aas, during one and the same night.

These three persons were very fanatical, revengeful and daring and were prepared to achieve their object at any cost. However, in the case of Abdur Rahman ibn Muljam a strange thing happened which spurred his resolve and made it so firm that even if the other two Kharijites had hesitated in killing

Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas; there was no likelihood of his wavering in the assassination of Ali. It so happened that he came from Mecca to Kufa and stayed there with a friend of his.

There he suddenly met a woman named Qattam daughter of Al-Akhzar who was a matchless beauty of her time, and whose father and brother were killed in the Battle of Nahrawan. Abdur Rahman fell in love with her and proposed to her at once. She asked him as to what dowry he would give her. He told her that he would give her anything she desired. Thereupon she said: "I want you to give me three thousand dirhams, one slave and one slave-girl and also to assassinate Ali son of Abu Talib". He replied: "It is easy to provide three thousand dirhams, a slave and a slave-girl, but how can I assassinate Ali?" She replied: "Kill him with some trick. If you kill him you will feel satisfied and will also enjoy my company for a long time".

Before having met Qattam and conversed with her Abdur Rahman ibn Muljam was somewhat shaken in his resolution to assassinate Ali, because in spite of all his meanness it was not an easy task for him to kill the Imam for an offence with which he had no concern. Similarly it was also not easy for him to take a dreadful step, whose result was likely to be extremely dangerous. However, fate willed it that Abdur Rahman ibn Muljam should become confirmed in his resolve and get ready to commit the most heinous crime. Fate took out a new arrow from its quiver and gave it in the hand of ibn Muljam to aim it at the Imam's bosom.

Fate took Abdur Rahman ibn Muljam to his friend's house and also brought Qattam at that place. Then there took place the strange conversation about dowry, about which a poet says:

"I have neither seen in Arabia nor anywhere else any person so generous that he should have given to any woman dowry equal to that of Qattam i.e. three thousand dirhams, one slave, one slave-girl and the assassination of Ali with a sharp sword. Howsoever large a dowry may be it cannot be greater than Ali, and every murder is easier as compared with that of Ali, which was committed by ibn Muljam".

The conversation of Qattam and ibn Muljam ended with this remark of the latter: "All right. It will be as you wish. I undertake to assassinate Ali".

The three Kharijites who had plotted against the lives of Ali, Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas during an appointed night proceeded to their destinations. And then something strange and possibly unprecedented happened, for which none could be held responsible.

The man who had gone to kill Amr ibn al-Aas did not succeed in achieving his end. Perhaps fate had willed that he should not overpower Amr ibn al-Aas. It so happened that during that night Amr became indisposed and this indisposition saved his life. He did not come out of his house either to offer prayers or to perform any other job. He asked the police-officer of the city named Kharija ibn Huzafa to lead the dawn prayers in his place. When the police-officer came out of the house Amr bin Bakr took him for Amr ibn al-Aas and killed him.

When Amr bin Bakr was captured and taken before Amr ibn al-Aas the latter said to him: “You wanted to kill me but God willed that Kharija should be killed”. Then he ordered Amr bin Bakr to be beheaded.

When Mu`awiya came to the masjid and Bark bin Abdullah saw him he aimed his sword at his head, but the sword actually struck his buttocks and the attack proved to be abortive. Mu`awiya's buttocks served as his shield and his life was saved.

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