

The Strategy of the Imams

Another noteworthy issue in the lives of the infallible Imams is the analysis of their companions and disciples of their objectives, strategies and contentions. Obviously, the companions of the infallible Imams were closer than us to them and were better aware of their objectives and contentions. What was their understanding of this issue? Don't these traditions indicate that they were waiting for the uprising and resurrection of the infallible Imams?

We all know the story of a man who came from Khurasan to Imam Sadiq (as) telling him that hundreds of armed men were waiting for his order to rise. The Imam expressed his surprise about the figure and doubted its authenticity. The messenger frequently reduced the figure. Finally, enumerating the required characteristics of ideal forces, the Imam mentioned a figure (12, 15, or so), saying: "if I had 12 or 15 companions and disciples, I would have led an uprising."

Several numbers of such people used to ask the Imam to rise. Of course in some cases they were the spies of the Abbasside. We can ascertain from the answers of the Imam that they were Abbasside spies.

Why did such people contact the Imam? Because in the Shiite culture of those days, uprising and rising for the establishment of a justly government was a definite objective of the Imams. The understanding and conclusion of the Shiites and companions was that the infallible Imams were waiting for an appropriate opportunity to rise.

I have come across an interesting tradition in this regard, which can help us understand the analysis of the top disciples -- like Zararah ibn A'yan -- of the Imams objectives. According to this tradition: "Once Zararah goes to Imam Sadiq (as) and says: One of our friends has fled because of indebtedness. If the issue [uprising or your rule] is close, he should wait and rise with the insurgent; if it is to be postponed, he should compromise with them." The Imam says: "It will happen." Zararah asks: "will it happen within a year?" The Imam says: "God Willing, it will happen." He again asks: "will it happen within two years?" The Imam says: "God Willing, it will happen." Zararah is convinced that the Alawi' government will come to power within two years.

In another tradition, Hisham ibn Salem narrates: "One day Zararah told me: 'You will not see anybody

else than Ja'far ibn Muhammad (Imam Sadiq AS) on the Caliphate throne.¹ Hisham says: When Imam Sadiq passed away, I told Zararah: do you remember your remark?' I was afraid that he would deny it. Zararah said: Swear by God, I had told you my own opinion.¹ In fact, Zararah wanted to make sure that his statement had not been considered as a quotation on behalf of the Imam.

It can be clearly inferred from several traditions in the field of expectation for uprising or request of the disciples of the infallible Imams in this regard that the objective of the infallible Imams had been the establishment of an Alawi government. This was a definite goal and strategy of the infallible Imams.

We should also study the reason behind the animosity and grudge of the Caliphs against the infallible Imams. Was the main reason for their animosity the spiritual status of the Imams and the people's fidelity to them? Was there any other reason behind this animosity? Without any doubt the caliphs and others envied the Imams. There are a number of traditions on the interpretation of the following Qur'anic verse:

"Or do they envy people because of what God has given them out of His bounty? [4: 54]

In one of such traditions, the infallible Imam says: "We are those people whom have been envied."¹ That is, the Quranic verse refers to us as those who are envied. What particular characteristic of the infallible Imams the caliphs envied at? Did they envy their knowledge and piety? We know that there were a number of clerics and ascetics who were known for their knowledge and piety during those days; they had also a large number of friends and companions.

Such famous figures as Abu Hanifah, Abu Yusuif, Hassan Basri, Sufyan Thawri, Muhammad ibn Shahab and tens of similar figures had large numbers of followers and sympathizers and were very popular and famous. But at the same time not only the caliphs did not envy them, but also they respected and cherished these figures.

In our opinion, the reason for the animosity of the Caliphs against the infallible Imams which normally led to their martyrdom after lengthy imprisonment, tortures, captivity and exiles, lies somewhere else, that is, their contention for caliphate and Imamate. The infallible Imams insisted on this contention, while others did not. This issue requires further research and study.

Yet another issue, which requires research and study is the radical moves and confrontation of the infallible Imams with the Caliphate system. There are ample examples of such movements throughout the Imamate era. During the era of Imam Sajjad (as), that is, the apogee of repression, Yahya ibn Tawil, a disciple of his holiness, goes to the Medina Mosque, where addressing the people who had surrendered to the Caliphate system, or the officials of the Caliphate system, he recites a verse of the holy Qur'an.

The verse contains a statement, which Prophet Abraham (as) had addressed to the infidels:

"... We disown you, and hostility and hatred have been set in between us for ever..." [60: 4]

Also in Kufa, addressing the public and a group of the Shiites, he loudly makes some remarks, which contain protest against the ruling system.

Mu'alla ibn Khunais used to participate in religious feasts while wearing untidy, wrinkled clothes, having untrimmed beards and hair, and showing a sad face. When the lecturer started his sermon at the ceremony, he would rise his hands, saying: O, God, this is the pulpit and position which belongs to your vicegerents (the infallible Imams) and selected ones, but have been usurped and grabbed by others."

Unfortunately, this sublime disciple (Mu'alla) who was praised by Imam Sadiq (as) and whose murderer was cursed by the Imam, has not received due attention by some people who doubt his piety. Probably, the dirty hands of the Abbasside have played a role in tarnishing his image.

Another issue, which requires extensive, profound discussion, is the issue of "Taqiyyah" or "precautionary dissimulation". To understand this issue, it is necessary to analyze all the traditions on camouflage, preservation, and clandestine activities in order to understand the true meaning of Taqiyyah or precautionary dissimulation.

Taking into consideration the contention of Imamate by the infallible Imams that was discussed above, as well as the severity of the caliphs' reactions towards the contentions and activities of the infallible Imams and their disciples, reveals the deep concept of Taqiyyah¹.

What is certain, is that the precautionary dissimulation does not mean giving up endeavors and activities, rather it means concealing the activities. This issue is quite discernible through the available traditions.

The said issues are some of the important aspects of the lives of the infallible Imams. Of course, there are several other aspects of the political lives of these honorable figures, which require another time.

I have studied a lot in this regard, but unfortunately I do not have time to analyze and compile them. I wish others would continue this task and analyze the political lives of the infallible Imams to provide the people with the necessary information so that we could learn lessons from the lives of the infallible Imams not only as eternal memories, but as true examples and epitomes.

¹. Bihar-ul-Anwar, Vol. 23, P. 194, Tradition 20

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