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The volley of criticism

As we have explained above, Bani Umayyah and their supporters and the wealthy and influential persons of the time were responsible for the shortcomings in the administrative, political and financial policies of Uthman which resulted in great evils, disturbances, and chaos. Uthman himself was responsible for this state of affairs in no lesser a degree because he relied on Bani Umayyah and favoured them, ordered whatever they desired and forbade what they disliked. In fact they were the real rulers and Uthman was their obedient servant.

Imam Ali has drawn a very true picture of the caliph by saying: “He is like a man who is choked by drinking water” (because the remedy for being choked is drinking water, but if a person is choked owing to drinking water there can be no remedy for him). He further says: “A person whose favourites and confidants are corrupt is like one who is choked by drinking water”.

Just as Uthman had given complete freedom to Bani Umayyah to acquire influence and authority and allowed the dignitaries to accumulate and hoard wealth by exploiting the common people, he had also permitted his advisers to curb the freedom of the distinguished companions of the Prophet if they raised any objection, and asked them to do justice to the public.

It so happened very often that only placing restrictions on the truthful and justice-loving believers was not considered sufficient but Uthman awarded them severe punishment either of his own accord or on the suggestion of Marwan. He considered them to be his enemies as if they wanted to deprive him of the goodness of Marwan and his brother Harth. Uthman in all matters, whether big or small followed the advice of Bani Umayyah who were his chief advisers and had eventually lost his life on account of them. They took all powers in their own hands, whether with or without Uthman's willingness, and made him helpless. They really wanted his death, and secretly revolted against him, so that another Umayyad might become the caliph. All their supporters helped them in this matter and when Uthman got encircled by his enemies, they (i.e. Bani Umayyah) flew away leaving him in the lurch just as his other supporters had slipped away.

Uthman kept away from himself all those well wishers of his with whose help the conditions could

improve, and made Bani Umayyah his confidants and advisers. They advised him to keep at arm's length all those persons who were considered to be his enemies although in fact they were not his enemies.

A mischievous and ill-natured person, Marwan, was his chief adviser, but he did not consider Ali fit to be trusted, although if his views had been accorded weight he would have given Uthman sincere and far-sighted advice and would have stopped him from nepotism and showing special favour to his friends. He would have set the government on a stable and profitable path, and preference would have been given to welfare of common people, who have been protected from oppression and tyranny.

Marwan enjoyed such an influence on Uthman that he never acted then, went up to Uthman and told him that Ali and other distinguished companions were conspiring against him. He used to say: These people are instigating the public against you. The only way to maintain law and order and to save the caliphate is that you should kill Ali and all other distinguished companions of the Prophet so that the affairs of the State should be set up according to the advice of Bani Umayyah. It is they who are your relatives and real well-wishers who would like your rule to continue.

When general revolt against Uthman took place in all the cities he called a conference to consider ways and means to restore law and order. Only Bani Umayyah and their supporters were invited to attend this conference.

It was these very Bani Umayyah against whom the companions of the Prophet and the public had complaints and it was on account of them that the people had revolted. However, instead of calling the companions of the Prophet and holding consultations with them to improve the situation Uthman called those who were the root-cause of all troubles, and because of whom the people had become the enemies of Uthman.

All those who participated in the conference expressed their views and suggested ways and means of tackling the situation. It would appear that some of them wanted disturbances to continue because their interests could be served better by this. Others wanted the trouble to flare up for the same reason. Still others wanted improvement of the situation provided that their own influence and authority did not suffer.

All those who participated in the conference were inimical towards Ali. They were afraid that his justice, truthfulness and piety might spoil their own game and repress their oppressive activities, and his policy of equity and equality might make their capitalist government fall to the ground. The most active members of the conference were Mu`awiya, Marwan and Amr Aas. It can, therefore, well be imagined what the result of those consultations should have been.

Ali did not care if Uthman did not consult him in those difficult circumstances. He was anxious that the conditions of the Muslims should improve and justice and equity should be established, even though Uthman and his supporters might become his enemies. He continued to advise Uthman till the last moment to redress the grievances of the people and compensate them for the oppression suffered by

them so that his caliphate might not be endangered. Once when the people became furious and wanted to attack Uthman he pacified them, and also advised Uthman in these words: [1](#)

“People are waiting for me outside and they have sent me to you to settle the differences between you and them. I swear by God that I cannot understand what to tell you when I do not know anything of which you are not aware, and have not to communicate to you any news which has not already reached you. I know what you know. I did not know anything which I might tell you nor have I heard anything in private of which I might inform you. You saw as I saw and you heard as I heard. You have been in the company of the Prophet as we have been. The responsibility to act rightly did not rest more on the sons of Abi Quhafa and Khattab than it rests on you. In fact you are nearer to the Prophet on account of kinship than they were, and you are in a way the son-in-law of the Prophet, while they were not so.

You must fear God, I swear by God that I am not tendering you this advice because you cannot see anything and I am not telling you all this because you do not know it. And there is no question of your ignorance because the path of religious law is quite evident and clear. Take it to your heart that out of His slaves God likes most the just ruler, who is a guided person himself and guides others also, strengthens known practices and destroys unknown innovations. And the most despicable of the people before God is that unjust ruler who remains misguided and others too are misguided on account of him. I have heard the Prophet saying that on the Day of Judgment an oppressor will be brought in such a manner that there will be none who will help him or intercede for him and he will be thrown into the Hell straightaway”.(Nahj al-Balaghah)

Uthman was nonplussed when he heard logical remarks of Ali. He only said: “I have done nothing wrong. I have been only kind and benevolent to my kith and kin”.

Truth was intermingled with falsehood and good with evil. The malpractices of Bani Umayyah went on increasing. Uthman gave them plenty of rope and himself became helpless before them. Ali has drawn a concise and precise picture of the caliphate of Uthman in these words: “He supported his kinsmen in the most absurd manner”.

About his Umayyad kinsmen he says: “With him stood up Bani Umayyah, the descendants of his father, and they began to munch God's property just as a camel grazes spring grass”.

Thus Bani Umayyah and their supporters brought Uthman on a path which was the path of annihilation and ruin. It was for his nepotism that he lost his life. His wife Na`ela also knew to what direction Bani Umayyah were carrying him. She also knew that Ali was the most sincere and truthful person and the real well-wisher of Uthman. She, therefore, insisted upon him persistently that he should consult Ali. However, the wicked and mischievous advisers who were constantly hovering around Uthman opposed Na`ela's suggestion and said that she was an imprudent woman and he should not lend ears to what she suggested.

Once Marwan said to Uthman: “I swear by God that it is better to stick to your sins and apologize to

God, than that you should repent with fear”.

It means that Marwan admitted that Uthman's policy was wrong and his methods were the methods of wrong-doers, but according to him (i.e. Marwan) it was better to stick to one's sin and evil-doing than to feel ashamed and repent of it.

No advice could reach the ears of Uthman except that which was uttered by Marwan. Uthman agreed immediately to what Marwan said but did not listen to what was said by others.

Marwan spoke to the people in the name of the caliph and what he said consisted of nothing except censure, threats and obstinacy, and was sufficient to create an uproar against Uthman. Once he said, addressing the insurgents who had besieged Uthman's house: “What has happened to you people? Why have you gathered here? Do you want to take away the government from us?” This sentence of Marwan is sufficient to indicate the way of thinking of all the Umayyads, according to them all those oppressed persons who had come to get their grievances redressed had come only to loot and plunder.

Demand for the restoration of usurped rights and a just government, and stopping oppression and taking action against those who had violated the rights of the people, and similar other things in connection with which the people had come to lodge their complaints, were things which, according to Marwan, did not deserve any attention.

According to him the caliphate, sovereignty and rulership were the means of displaying power and authority and had nothing to do with the protection of the rights of the people or the safeguarding of the faith and the religious law. According to him it was the kingship of Bani Umayyah which they had been waiting for a long time to seize, and thus re-establish their power and authority which had been destroyed by Islam. And that being so he could not understand why the people should endeavour to deprive Bani Umayyah of their hereditary government.

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All those persons who disliked the financial and administrative policies of Bani Umayyah and criticized them sincerely became the target of Uthman's wrath on the suggestion of Marwan and his other associates and advisers. One of those persons who opposed these policies and methods was Abdullah bin Mas`ud, a distinguished companion of the Prophet. In order to explain how much the people were grieved on account of the oppression to which this companion of the Prophet was subjected, it appears necessary to give a brief account of his life history.

Abdullah bin Mas`ud was one of those persons who embraced Islam first of all. It is said that his number was sixth on the list. He had the honour of migrating twice in the first instance to Ethiopia and then to Madina. He always remained in the company of the Prophet. He was one of those whom the Prophet loved and respected for their truthfulness, honesty and piety.

The Muslims of the early era considered Ibn Mas`ud to be one of the greatest scholars. It was on

account of his profound knowledge that Umar sent him to Kufa to guide and educate the people of that city, although he himself needed his advice in Madina. While sending him to Kufa Umar sent a letter to the citizens of Kufa. He wrote: "I am sending Abdullah bin Mas`ud to educate you. By sending him to Kufa I have given you preference over myself. You should acquire knowledge from him".

Many Kufans benefited from Ibn Mas`ud. The number of his pupils increased day after day and they became renowned scholars. The famous Tabe`i (companion of the companions of the Prophet) Sa`id bin Jaybar used to say: "The pupils of Abdullah bin Mas`ud were the lamps of this city". (i.e. Kufa).

All the Muslims acknowledged Abdullah bin Mas`ud to be an erudite scholar. So much so that during the time of Umar it was he to whom the Kufans referred their religious problems and only his judgments were accepted by them. In the matter of exegesis also he was one of the topmost authorities, and his rank was almost equal to that of Abdullah bin Abbas. He had many pupils who distinguished themselves in this branch of learning, such as Qatada and Masrooq ibn Ajda`.

In short Abdullah bin Mas`ud was the most respectable personality of his time. He was honoured in all Islamic cities more than every other companion of the Prophet. How did Uthman behave towards this distinguished companion? Ibn Mas`ud was one of those distinguished companions who openly disapproved and fearlessly criticized the policies and the modus operandi of Bani Umayyah. On every Friday he used to say in Kufa: "The most correct word is the Book of God and the best guidance is that provided by Prophet Muhammad and the worst things are innovations. Every innovation is deviation and every deviation leads one to Hell".

The above statement of Ibn Mas`ud contained clear criticism of Uthman and the actions which he took for the benefit of only Bani Umayyah and the wealthy and influential persons ignoring the welfare of the common man. He said many things criticizing Uthman, for example, he said: "In the eyes of God Uthman does not have even as much value as the feather of a fly".

Walid bin Uqbah, the Governor of Kufa, resented very much the remarks of Ibn Mas`ud about Uthman. This Walid was a brother of Uthman from his mother's side and was a great drunkard and a licentious person. Uthman had appointed him as the Governor of Kufa notwithstanding the displeasure of the residents of that city.

Walid wrote to Uthman informing him that Ibn Mas`ud criticized and abused him (Uthman). Uthman asked him to send Abdullah to him. It has been narrated that when Abdullah left Kufa for Madina many persons came to bid him farewell. Everyone of them requested him not to leave Kufa and assured him that they could not let him suffer any harm. He, however, replied: "There is something which must happen soon".

Abdullah bin Mas`ud reached Madina on Friday night. When Uthman came to know about his arrival he made the people gather in the masjid and said to them: "Just see a mean animal is coming towards you who tramples on his food, vomits and excretes". Ibn Mas`ud said: "I am not like that. Of course, I am a

companion of the Prophet. I was with him in the Battle of Badr and also participated in ***Bai`at al-Rizwan*** (the oath of allegiance taken under a tree at Hudaibiya).

Ayesha said loudly from her house: "Uthman! You are saying these words about a companion of the Prophet!" Others also disliked these remarks and expressed their resentment. As ordered by Uthman his officials and slaves turned Ibn Mas`ud out from the masjid in a very rude manner. They dragged him to the gate of the masjid and there they threw him down on the ground. Then they beat him so mercilessly that he broke his bones and from there he was carried home like a dead body.

Uthman was not satisfied with the beating and insulting to which this great companion of the Prophet was subjected. He stopped the stipend which he used to get from the Public Treasury and deprived him of all his sources of livelihood. He also ordered the people not to visit him to enquire about his health. Eventually Ibn Mas`ud passed away and Ammar Yasir offered his funeral prayers and buried him secretly. When Uthman was informed about it he became very furious.

Another respectable person who became the target of Uthman's wrath was Ammar Yasir. He was one of those great personalities of Islam who are well-known for their virtues, high morals and piety. His worth and value was best known to the Prophet and he knew what great merits he possessed. That is why he paid him glowing tributes which he amply deserved. For example he said about him: "When dissensions take place between the people the son of Sumayyah (i.e. Ammar) will be on the side of right"

Many differences arose between the Muslims during the early days of Islam and Ammar always sided with Ali. It was on account of these qualities and virtues that the Muslims loved him and Bani Umayyah and their supporters were his sworn enemies.

The first action of Uthman which Ammar disliked was that he made wealth a plaything in the hands of the affluent persons. As explained by Ammar himself he used to meet Uthman very often and advised him to administer justice, avoid nepotism and refrain from making Bani Umayyah the overlords of the people. Consequently Uthman got annoyed with him as he was annoyed with other virtuous people.

It has been narrated that there was a casket in the Public Treasury which contained ornaments and gems. Uthman removed this jewellery from the treasury and gave it to one of his wives to wear. The people objected to this and criticized him severely which made him furious. Speaking in a public gathering he said: "I shall take whatever I like out of the war booty, and damn care if some one dislikes it". Thereupon Ali said: "In that event you will be restrained from doing so and a wall will be raised between you and the Public Treasury". Ammar said: "I call God to witness that I am the first person to dislike this misappropriation". Thereupon Uthman said: "O Ammar! How dare you speak against me? Arrest him".

Suddenly Marwan got up and said to Uthman: "O Commander of the Faithful! This slave (Ammar) has instigated the people against you. If you kill him others will learn a lesson".

Uthman got ready immediately to act on Marwan's suggestion. He picked up his stick and beat Ammar mercilessly. His slaves and other members of the Umayyad Family also helped him. Uthman also kicked him in a very insulting manner and inflicted him so many kicks on his belly below the navel that he developed hernia. Thereafter he was thrown on the road while it was raining and thundering, and he became almost dead.

The third distinguished companion of the Prophet who was subjected to dreadful torture by Uthman and other members of the Umayyad Family was the great reformer Abu Dharr Ghifari. It was the same Abu Dharr who is renowned for his philanthropy and love for justice. He was a supporter and most devoted follower of Ali.

In order to explain the true position of the opponents of Uthman's policies and the conduct of Bani Umayyah we give below a brief account of the life history of Abu Dharr who was one of the greatest men of his time.

During the age of ignorance Abu Dharr was an indigent person but in spite of that he was the chief of his tribe. When he heard about the Prophet he came to Mecca in such a condition that he was wearing a worn out and tattered cloak. On reaching Mecca he began roaming about on the streets. At last when he got tired he lay down on the ground near the Ka`abah, placing his cloak under his head. In the meantime Ali chanced to pass by him and took much pity on him, because it appeared that he was a poverty-stricken stranger, who was not acquainted with anyone in the city. They got themselves introduced to each other and Ali took Abu Dharr to his house. Later he took him to the Prophet. On meeting the Prophet Abu Dharr immediately embraced Islam. He was the fifth to adopt this religion.

Abu Dharr was so sincere and brave that after embracing Islam he stood near the Ka`abah where a large number of Quraysh – the fell enemies of Islam – were assembled. There he ridiculed the idols and invited those present to Islam. Till then none had been able to show such valour. Quraysh assaulted him and beat him so much that he was almost dead.

Abu Dharr was the most favourite and dear companion of the Prophet on account of his foresight, prudence, wisdom, zeal for reform, and love for the poor. The people also relied upon him and respected him very much. All the companions held him in great respect. Ali has said about him: “Abu Dharr has such vast knowledge that none has been able to equal him”.

When Uthman attained to the caliphate Abu Dharr's astonishment knew no bounds. He could not understand why Uthman had been made caliph in the presence of a learned and pious person like Ali. However, he did not open his lips against this selection because Ali did not want that any disturbance should take place for his sake. Soon afterwards, however, Abu Dharr saw that whereas the common people were leading very miserable lives Bani Umayyah were amassing wealth and living in luxury. He felt that Uthman showering wealth upon his relatives by depriving the common people of their rights, and this disturbed him very much. He openly criticized this policy which had divided the people into two

groups – the affluent and the indigent.

Abu Dharr often addressed the people in these words: “Such things are taking place as were never seen or heard of previously. I swear by God that such actions are neither sanctioned by Qur'an – the Book of God nor supported by the Sunnah of the Prophet. I swear by God that I see that truth is being suppressed and falsehood is being encouraged. Things which are right and true are being refuted and impious persons are being preferred. O assembly of the wealthy and persecutors of the poor! Inform **“..those who hoard gold and silver and do not spend their wealth in the path of God..”** of burning from the Fire **“..with which their foreheads, flanks and backs will be branded..”** (9:34-35)

He added: “You have adopted silken curtains and seats and have become habituated to lying in azrabi silk whereas the Prophet used to sleep on a mat. You eat food of various kinds whereas the Prophet did not eat even barley bread to his fill”.

Abu Dharr demanded from the party in authority to do justice to the poor people who had been deprived of their rights. He encouraged the people to wrest their rights by force and to put an end to indigence which is the source of humiliation and an enemy of virtue. He used to utter the following sentences often:

- “I wonder as to why a person who has nothing in his house to eat, does not draw a sword and attack the people”.
- “When poverty proceeds towards a town infidelity asks it to take it with itself”.

He was so disgusted with the egotism and profiteering of Bani Umayyah that he left Hijaz and went away to Syria, so that he might not see the extravagance of Uthman and Marwan with his own eyes. However, on reaching there he found that the activities of Mu`awiya were even more objectionable than those of Uthman and Marwan. (The fact is that Abu Dharr did not go to Syria of his own free will. He was exiled there by Uthman). There he said that Mu`awiya's extravagance had far exceeded that of Uthman and Marwan.

He saw that Mu`awiyah had become the master of the Public Treasury as well as of the lives and property of the people. He observed that he squandered away the property of the Public Treasury, grabbed the earnings of the Muslims and killed whomsoever he wished to. All this made him too furious. When Mu`awiya constructed the Green Palace Abu Dharr sent him a message saying: “If you have built this palace by spending the property of God you have been guilty of misappropriation and if you have spent the money from your own pocket you have been very extravagant”.

Bani Umayyah could not tolerate such a truthful, freedom loving and out-spoken person, nor could they permit him to mix up with the people. Marwan instigated Uthman every now and then to get rid of him. Uthman asked Mu`awiya to take repressive measures against Abu Dharr.

Mu`awiya turned Abu Dharr out of his court and issued orders that none should associate with him. It

was at Uthman's behest that Mu`awiya said to that distinguished companion of the Prophet: "O enemy of God! You instigate people to be against me and do whatever you like. If I had killed any companion of the Prophet without the prior permission of the ruling caliph it would have been you". Abu Dharr replied: "I am not an enemy of God or of His Prophet. Rather it is you and your father who have been the enemies of God. Both of you embraced Islam only outwardly and infidelity still lies hidden in your heart".

Abu Dharr did not attach any importance to Mu`awiya's threats, and continued reforming the Syrian society with so great a zeal and enthusiasm, that Mu`awiya was out of his wits. The rich people of Syria were as scared of his reformative activities as the people of Madina were. They feared that the common people might attack them.

They, therefore, considered it necessary that Abu Dharr should be turned out of Syria as early as possible, and should also be restrained from making any speeches so that he might not bring their malpractices to light. In the meantime a man named Jundab bin Fehri came to Mu`awiya and said as a sincere adviser and in a meek tone: "Abu Dharr will create trouble for you in Syria. If you need Syria, you should take care of it immediately".

Mu`awiya thought of killing Abu Dharr but feared that the people might revolt. As said by Hasan Basri: "Mu`awiya did not refrain from killing a distinguished companion like Abu Dharr, because he feared Uthman's displeasure. He did not kill him, because he was afraid of the displeasure of the public. He therefore, wrote to Uthman and sought his advice. Uthman replied: "Send Abu Dharr to me mounted on a vicious animal along with a man who should subject him to as much trouble as possible on the way".

Mu`awiya did as he was advised by Uthman. He made Abu Dharr mount a camel with a saddle on which there was no cover. By the time he reached Madina pieces of flesh were cut off from his thighs and owing to the long journey he had broken his back. From Damascus to Madina he was accompanied by cruel and savage soldiers who did not care either for the hot weather or for his fatigue. He was very much tired and had become lean and weak when he reached before Uthman.

Immediately on seeing Abu Dharr Uthman protested against his activities. Abu Dharr replied: "I wished you well but you deceived me. Similarly I wished your friend (Mu`awiya) well but he also deceived me". Uthman said: "You are a liar. You want to create trouble. You have turned the entire country of Syria against us".

Abu Dharr said with great confidence and composure: "You should follow in the footsteps of Abu Bakr and Umar. If you do so none will say anything against you".

Uthman said: "May your mother die! What have you to do with this matter?"

Abu Dharr replied: "So far as I am concerned I had no alternative but to order the people to do good and to restrain them from evil".

Its contention between Abu Dharr and Uthman became much more serious. Abu Dharr accused Uthman of being subservient to his wishes was disobedient to God, and unkind to His creatures. Uthman got very much annoyed and cried out: "O people! Tell me how to deal with this aged liar. Should I beat him or kill him or banish him from the Islamic territories? He has created a split among the Muslims".

At that time Ali was also there. He was very much grieved to see the treatment meted out by Uthman to a great reformer and distinguished companion like Abu Dharr. He turned towards Uthman and said: "I heard the Prophet saying that between the earth and the heavens there is none more truthful than Abu Dharr".

Uthman continued harassing Abu Dharr. He ordered the people not to associate with him. Then he thought of becoming reconciled with Abu Dharr. He, therefore, sent him two hundred gold coins to meet his needs. Abu Dharr asked the man who had brought the money to him: "Has Uthman given the same amount to every Muslim?" The man replied in the negative. Abu Dharr returned the money to Uthman and said, "I am a member of the Muslim society and should, therefore, get only as much as others get". When he returned the gold coins there was nothing in his house to eat except a stale loaf of barley bread!

In the first instance Uthman handed over Abu Dharr to the executioners. On reconsideration, however, he decided to banish him to Rabazah. It was a barren region where neither man, nor animal nor vegetation could survive.

When the time of Abu Dharr's departure drew near Uthman prohibited the people, in order to grieve, insult and humiliate him, to see him off. None except five persons, therefore, picked up courage to see him off. The five persons were Ali, his brother Aqil, Hasan, Husayn and Ammar Yasir.

The responsibility to supervise the departure of Abu Dharr rested with Marwan who was the source of all evils. It was he who had enforced Uthman's order that none should converse with Abu Dharr and the members of his family or see them off. He was so bold as to prevent Ali and his companions from seeing off Abu Dharr. Ali rebuked him, struck him with his stick and shouted: "Be off from here! May God throw you into the Hell".

Then he bade farewell to Abu Dharr in these words: "O Abu Dharr! You were annoyed with these people for the sake of God. So you should expect your recompense also from Him only. They feared you because on account of your activities they might lose the world (i.e. worldly gains) and you were afraid of them because you wanted to safeguard your faith. So leave to them that thing on account of which they feared you (i.e. worldly gains) and keep aloof from them along with your faith. See how much they need that faith on which you did not permit them to gain control, and see how independent you are of the world of which they have deprived you!

You will come to know tomorrow (i.e. on the Day of Judgment) who has been the winner and who has displayed envy. Even if a person is precluded from the earth as well as from the heavens but he fears

God, the Almighty certainly opens a path for him. You will always remain in love with truth and will shun falsehood. If you, too, had accepted their world they would have liked you and if you had borrowed from this world they would have provided you asylum".(Nahj al-Balaghah).

Then Ali asked Aqil and Ammar to bid farewell to their brother and also asked Hasan and Husayn to say goodbye to their uncle. When Uthman came to know about this incident he was very much annoyed with Ali.

One may ask as to how it happened that Ali saw Abu Dharr being subjected to torture and oppression but took no steps to save him from the tyranny of the caliph of the time? Abu Dharr was a distinguished companion of the Prophet and a great supporter of Ali and was opposing the caliph not for any personal gain but to ensure the welfare of the people. Then why did Ali remain quiet?

If he had so desired he could restrain Uthman from banishing Abu Dharr and could use all his resources to make the people stand up in opposition to Bani Umayyah. And there is no doubt about the fact that the Muslims would have supported Ali wholeheartedly. Then what was the reason for this silence of Ali?

Just as this question occurs to everybody's mind, it occurred to my mind also. I thought that whereas one aspect of Ali's remaining quiet on this occasion is quite clear and evident and the other is very intricate and not understandable by everyone.

The intricate aspect is that Ali's time was not the present one. He lived more than 1300 years ago. Circumstances and conditions which existed at that time cannot be assessed properly in the present twentieth century nor can we understand all their aspects. Probing the real causes has not been possible in spite of deep investigations conducted by many researchers. Ali knew and understood many subtleties of his own time which were not visible to others, and his line of action was based on the exigencies of the time which were known to him only.

However, the aspect of his quietness which is quite evident is that the spirit of sacrifice was present in the very nature of Ali and he was prepared to suffer any hardship for the sake of the welfare of the people. He was so mindful of the safety of Islam that he did not care for anything except that.

The more deeply we study the conduct and character of Ali, and examine all aspects of his life, the more we are convinced of this reality. He could not tolerate that the advancement and propagation of Islam should slacken in the least. He knew very well the mentality of Bani Umayyah before and after their embracement of Islam, but he was afraid that if the Muslims arrayed themselves against them dissensions would take place among the followers of Islam and they would be harmful for this religion.

Ali knew that Bani Umayyah wanted to kill all the true believers who constituted the real support for Islam so that they might free themselves from the restrictions imposed by Islamic law and there should be none left to object to their activities.

Is it not a fact that Marwan bin Hakam instigated Uthman to kill Ali and other distinguished companions like Abu Dharr and Ammar? His object in making this suggestion was that with the removal of these persons from the scene Bani Umayyah should be free to do what they liked, because while these pious and dauntless companions of the Prophet were present Bani Umayyah could not create mischief and act as despotic ruler.

Had Marwan's desire been fulfilled it cannot be assessed how much trouble Bani Umayyah would have created. It was, therefore, the height of Ali's foresight and prudence that he expressed only so much resentment in the matter of injustice done to Abu Dharr as he used to express in connection with the oppression to which he himself was subjected.

He did this so that the Muslims might not become the enemies of one another.

This had happened earlier also on the occasion of **Saqifa**. Umar came to Ali's house and dragged him at the point of sword to take oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr. The Muslims were gathered round Ali at that time. Some of them were astonished whereas others were beside themselves with rage. All were expecting a hint from him so that they might fight for his defence. No doubt Ali, who was the pillar of Islam, the citadel of justice, and the Imam of all the people, but what did he do for himself?

When the people saw Umar taking Ali before the caliph at the point of the sword, they were much surprised. However when they looked at his face they did not find any sign of anger on it. He neither incited the people nor raised his voice, nor allowed them to draw their swords. The people were surprised all the more when a few moments later they saw Ali standing before them (i.e. Abu Bakr, Umar etc.) very calmly and arguing his case with a view to convincing them about his right. None dared to open his mouth in reply. He was establishing his right with solid arguments but tolerated the usurpation of his right in the interest of the people. Ali was justified in proving his right through protests and arguments, and was also justified in showing patience, calmness, forbearance and forgiveness. He knew himself very well.

The supporters of Ali were surprised at the attitude adopted by him. But there was one thing which Ali knew but others did not know. And that was the thing which Ali aimed at and which was the source of his peace of mind. This refers to the fact that he had worked with the Prophet to lay the foundation of Islam. He equally shared the responsibility of propagation of Islam. How could he tolerate that this religion should suffer destruction? That was the reason why he sacrificed his own rights, and he acted in the case of Abu Dharr in the same manner in which he had acted in his own case.

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What happened to Abu Dharr after his banishment?

The aged and great companion of the Prophet died of hunger. He and the members of his family lived in

extremely hard conditions and had to suffer unprecedented miseries. Their children also passed away due to lack of food.

It has been narrated that after the death of their children Abu Dharr and his wife grew very weak on account of hunger. One day Abu Dharr said to his wife: "Let us go upto that mound. It is possible that we may find some wild fruits there". They went upto the mound. Inclement winds were blowing and they could not find anything to eat. Abu Dharr began to faint. Although very cold wind was blowing but Abu Dharr was perspiring and wiped his sweat again and again. When his wife looked at him she realized that he was going to die. She began to weep. Abu Dharr asked her why she was weeping. She replied: "Why should I not weep? You are breathing your last on this barren land, and I don't have even a piece of cloth which maybe used as a shroud for you and me". Her words grieved Abu Dharr very very much. He said to her: "Go and stand by the side of the road. It is possible that you may meet a believer who may be passing that way". She replied: "Who will pass this way now? The caravan of the pilgrims has already passed and the road is deserted".

Abu Dharr recalled the words which the Prophet had uttered about him. He said to his wife: "Go and see carefully. If you find someone coming you will be relieved of your worry. And if you don't find anyone you should cover my dead body and place it by the side of the road. As and when you chance to meet the first rider tell him: "Abu Dharr the companion of the Prophet has died. Now assist in bathing and shrouding him".

Abu Dharr's wife ascended the mound time and again but could not find any human being. After some time, however, she saw some riders at a distance and beckoned them by moving her cloth. They came up to her and said: "O bondwoman of God! What is the matter?" She replied: "Here is a Muslim who is dying; please arrange for his bathing, shrouding and burial. God will recompense you for this". They asked: "Who is the man?" She replied: "His name is Abu Dharr Ghifari".

The men could not believe that such a distinguished companion of the Prophet could die in the desert. They, therefore, asked her: "Who is this Abu Dharr? Is he the companion of the Prophet?" She said "Yes". They said: "May our parents be his ransom! God has granted us a great honour". They then hurried to the place where Abu Dharr was lying. Abu Dharr was feeling the pangs of death. He fixed his eyes on their faces for some time trying to recognise their faces, and then said: "By God I have not told a lie. By God if I had sufficient cloth for my and my wife's shroud I would certainly have been shrouded in that cloth. I ask you in the name of God that if anyone of you has been a ruler or a government employee or a messenger or a chief at any time he should not shroud me".

Those present were bewildered to hear these words because almost all of them had held these offices at one time or another. Suddenly a young man from amongst the Ansar stepped forward and said: "O uncle! I shall shroud you with this mantle which I had purchased with the money that I had earned through hard work. I will shroud you with this cloth whose thread was spun by my mother so that I might use it as *Ehram* (pilgrim's garb)".

He said to the young man: “Shroud me with these pieces of cloth, for they are pure”. Now he was happy and satisfied. Then he cast a glance at them again and passed away peacefully. Then the dark and thick clouds covered the sky. Strong and severe winds began to blow and the desert sand sprang up and darkened the atmosphere. It might be said that the desert of Rabazah got converted into a roaring ocean.

The Ansari young man stood by the grave of Abu Dharr and prayed in these words (The historians have attributed them to Malik Ashtar): “O God! This Abu Dharr is one of the companions of Your Prophet. He worshipped You amongst the worshippers. He performed jihad against the idol-worshippers. He did not alter any Sunnah (practice) of the Prophet nor did he tamper with any law. He saw bad and indecent things being done and expressed his disgust at them with his heart and tongue. As a result of this people oppressed and insulted him and turned him out of his house. They deprived him of his rights and humiliated him and eventually he passed away in a helpless condition. May God break the feet of the person who deprived him (of the amenities of life) and banished him from the sacred city of Madina to which he had migrated”.

All those who were present said “Amen!” very sincerely. Blessed be Abu Dharr who rose and endeavoured, to establish truth till he breathed his last. He had faith in the greatness of man and his rights. He was a magnanimous and kind man. He was never afraid of death, nor was he ever enamoured by life.

The tragic events of Abu Dharr and his wife and children stirred the blood of the people and every one of them sympathised with the oppressed family. While many other actions of Uthman had raised the people against him this one incident added to their resentment against him and Bani Umayyah. It was considered to be a very wicked policy that anyone who objected to nepotism and family bias should be treated savagely as was done in the case of Abdullah bin Mas`ud, Ammar Yasir and Abu Dharr. They were insulted and beaten and their pensions and stipends were stopped.

On the contrary, Bani Umayyah were showered with all the benefits, wealth, and ranks. Uthman bestowed honours on them and gave them enormous wealth, although it was necessary for him that he should have ousted them from important positions on account of their nefarious activities.

Another action of Uthman which aroused the anger of the people was his maltreatment of the persons who went to him to complain against Walid bin `Uqba. The details of this incident are as follows:

Uthman dismissed Sa`d bin Abi Waqas from the governorship of Kufa and replaced him by Walid bin `Uqba, who was Uthman's brother from the side of his mother. The people of Kufa were very much displeased on account of this appointment. It is said that when Walid arrived in Kufa and passed by the house of Umar ibn Zararah Nakh`i Umar stood up and said: “O Bani Asad! Uthman has treated us very badly. Was it just on his part to remove from amongst us Sa`d bin Abi Waqas, who is a mild and well-behaved person, and to appoint in his place his brother Walid who is an idiot, a madman and an old

debauchee. After the appointment of Walid it was commonly said by the people of Kufa that Uthman had humiliated the followers of Prophet Muhammad and had tried to honour his brother.

Many complaints were lodged with Uthman against Walid but he did not remove him from the governorship, although most of the complainants were the companions of the Prophet. Uthman's conduct in respect of Walid was the same as it was with regard to his kinsfolk. Just as he did not accept any suggestions, or entertained any complaint against his near relations, he never paid any heed to the complaints against Walid as well.

Allama Bin Abd Rabbih quotes Sa'id bin Musayyab in his book entitled *'Iqd al-Farid* as saying that the companions of the Prophet disliked the caliphate of Uthman very much because most of the officers appointed by him belonged to Bani Umayyah and they did things which were abhorred by the companions. Complaints were lodged against these officers with Uthman but he did not remove those officers.

The poet Hati'ah says about Walid:

“Hati'ah will give evidence on the Day of Judgment that Walid is innocent”.

“When the prayers were finished he asked the people in a loud voice: “If you say, I may increase it”.

“He wanted to make an increase upon something good. If the people had agreed he would have led the dawn prayers which would have exceeded ten *rak'ats* (units)”.

“But O Abu Wahab, the people refused to agree. If they had accepted your suggestion you would have combined *Shaf`* with *Witr*”.

“You moved on, but the people held your bridle. If they had released it you would have walked on and on”.

A number of men came from Kufa and complained to Uthman against Walid. Uthman, however, rebuked and threatened them instead of paying any heed to their complaints and flogged those who gave evidence against his malpractices, although their only offence was that they brought the evil deeds of Walid to the notice of Uthman.

The most severe treatment meted out by Bani Umayyah to their opponents or to those whom they considered to be in the category of their opponents (because they desired that the masses should have a right in caliphate, and it should not become property of Bani Umayyah) was seen in their treatment with Muhammad bin Abi Bakr and the Egyptians who were going to Egypt. As this incident has a very close connection with the murder of Uthman we shall discuss it in detail in the following chapter.

1. In order to make the bitterness of advice palatable Imam Ali spoke at the outset in such a way that instead of getting irritated Uthman should feel his duties and responsibilities. Ali wanted to draw his attention towards his obligations, and with that purpose in view he mentioned his (Uthman's) companionship of the Prophet as well as his importance and proximity to the Prophet on account of kinship. Otherwise this was evidently no occasion to praise him and these words should not be treated to be a panegyric ignoring the latter part of the remarks of Ali. The opening words simply go to show that whatever Uthman did was done by him intentionally.

It was not that he committed unintentional mistakes, which might be overlooked. If it be a virtue that even after remaining in the companionship of the Prophet and knowing all the rules and regulations of Islam a man should act in such a way that the entire world of Islam should begin to cry on account of his oppression, these remarks may be treated to be a praise. If it is not a merit, then its being mentioned cannot be termed as praise. In fact the words that have been used as praise are a proof of the seriousness of his offences. An offence committed intentionally is much more serious than the one committed inadvertently.

It is said that Uthman is entitled to great honour in the capacity of the son-in-law of the Prophet as the Prophet married to him, his two daughters named Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum one after the other. Before considering these matrimonial alliances a source of honour, however, the nature of this son-in-lawship should be looked into. History tells us that Uthman did not enjoy precedence in the matter. Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum were previously married to Atba and Ateeba, the son of Abu Lahab. In spite of this these two persons were not treated to be entitled to any honour or respect even before the advent of Islam. In the circumstances how can this relationship be treated to be a source of honour for Uthman without taking into account his personal qualities?

Furthermore, it is also not an established fact that the two ladies were the real daughters of the Prophet. There are some who do not admit them to be his real daughters but say that they were the daughters of lady Khadijah's sister named Hala or her own daughters from her former husband.

Alkuti (died 352 A.H.) says: "A short time after lady Khadijah getting married to the Prophet her sister Hala died and left behind two daughters named Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum. They were brought up by Khadijah and the Prophet. It was customary before the advent of Islam that if an orphan was brought up by someone it was called his son or daughter". (Kitab al-Istighatha, p.69).

"Before marrying the Prophet lady Khadija was married to Abi Hala bin Malik and had one son named Hind and one daughter named Zainab from him. Earlier than that she was married to `Atiq bin `Aa'ez and had one son and one daughter from him". (Seerah Ibn Hisham, Vol.4, p.293).

This shows that lady Khadijah had two daughters before she married the Prophet. As mentioned above, according to the custom then prevailing, they were to be called the Prophet's daughters and their husband was to be called his son-in-law. However, his position as son-in-law would be commensurate with the position of the daughters. Hence, before treating these marriages to be a source of honour the actual position of the daughters (i.e. their real parentage) must be kept in view.

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