Al-Islam.org
Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project
Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

A great conspiracy

Persons Responsible for the Assassination of Uthman

We have explained fully in the foregoing pages that people developed hatred in their hearts against the policies of Uthman in Madina as well as in other Islamic territories. Originally the people became dissatisfied at heart, but later began complaining and thereafter the complaints assumed the shape of disobedience which ended in the siege of the house of Uthman and his murder. We have also mentioned that those who criticized Uthman's policies and gave him good and useful advice were not ordinary persons but distinguished companions of the Prophet.

However, instead of Uthman abandoning his wrong policies and nepotism he and his kinsmen subjected the companions to harassment and torture and severe punishment. If these companions criticized the methods and policies of Uthman it was not due to their desire for any personal gain but on account of their love for justice and faith. They were the pick of the bunch. They knew fully well their responsibilities, which resembled those of the Prophets.

If Ali criticized Uthman's policy of granting big estates to his relatives without any justification it was not because he himself wanted any estate. And if he objected to his financial policies it was not because he was himself inclined to gain wealth. Everyone knows that he never cared for wealth. If he found fault with the nepotism of Uthman and his Umayyad mentality it was not because he wanted the welfare and superiority of his own family. It is impossible even to imagine that Ali could be prompted by such motives.

Ali was a pillar of Islam, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and the father of his dear grandsons. It was he who uttered this sentence: “The worth and value of every person is judged by his actions. One whose actions are better will enjoy more worth and dignity”. This sentence of his demolished the edifice of family and tribal dignity which one inherits.

The opposition to and hatred against Uthman's policies by Ammar and Abu Dharr was based on the same reasons on which Ali's opposition was based. Hence, their opposiuon did not mean that it should

have culminated in Uthman's death. What they desired was that he should abandon Umayyad mentality and nepotism and equity and justice should prevail. None of them wished him to be killed.

The Islamic State during the days of Uthman had covered vast areas and it was natural that in such a big State opposition of another kind should also take place. This opposition was from those persons who coveted power and authority and more gains, and wanted to expand the area of their influence. They opposed Uthman with the hope that if he was removed from office and was succeeded by another person more favourable to them, their dignity and influence would increase. Opposition of this type takes place in every region and in every age. The associates of every ruler change their attitude from time to time to achieve their personal ends.

The opponents of this kind during the time of Uthman were not all alike. His favourites who were accumulating wealth as a consequence of the gifts bestowed by him were opposed to him, and so also were those who were deprived of such bounties. And similar was the case with his relatives, officers and supporters, whom he had permitted not only to control the people but himself as well. These people were his real murderers.

We have already explained in the foregoing pages how Uthman provided the means of his own death and how Marwan and his favourites turned the Islamic world against him by their nefarious activities.

The reality was understood very clearly by those persons who had close connections with Uthman. One of them was Muhammad bin Muslimah. When he was about to die someone said: “Uthman has been killed”. Thereupon he (Muslimah) said: “Uthman himself has been responsible for his death”. Uthman's wife Na`ela said to Marwan and other favourites of her husband: “I swear by God that you will kill Uthman and make his children orphans”. And addressing Uthman she said: “If you act on Marwan's advice he will kill you”.

As regards the Umayyad governors, officers, and his supporters, whom Uthman had allowed to subjugate the people, and some of whom availed of his bounties and others, who were dissatisfied with him, we shall discuss them one by one soon, because a large number of these people hatched a great conspiracy against Ali– a conspiracy which was unprecedented in the East.

The conspiracy was engineered by those very persons who instigated the people against Uthman and thus besmeared their own hands with his blood. The conspiracy was that they accused Ali of the murder of Uthman. They took away the blood–stained shirt of Uthman and said that they wanted to avenge Uthman's murder.

Mu`awiya who ostensibly wanted to avenge the murder of Uthman was in reality keen to strengthen his own rule as well as that of his descendants. His efforts were directed towards strengthening his rule in Syria in the first instance. Then he wanted to expand his kingdom by grabbing other countries and eventually to become the despotic ruler of all the Islamic territories. He did not pay any heed to Uthman either during his lifetime or after his death. All that he wanted was that Uthman might make him powerful

day after day so that he might eventually achieve his final goal. Thus he desired that Uthman should allow him maximum freedom of action and should become a shield for him, so that he might achieve his objectives.

Even when Uthman was killed Mu`awiya did not care for his death. He only wanted to avail of the opportunity to claim to be the caliph's heir, and to get rid of the new caliph. What did he do with the murderers of Uthman when he himself became the sole ruler of the Islamic territories? Had he really been grieved on account of the murder of Uthman he could then locate and kill every one of his murderers. However, he completely forgot Uthman's murder and revenging him, although it was on this very pretext that he had revolted against the new caliph and thus became the cause of bloodshed of hundreds of thousands of the Muslims.

Furthermore, he could send a large army from Syria to defend Uthman when his house had been besieged by the insurgents. He was the permanent Governor of Syria and Uthman had allowed him maximum freedom. He could do what he liked and there was none who could call him to account. Thus he could send a large Syrian army to Madina before as well as after the house of Uthman was besieged. In fact he could also advise Uthman not to be adamant to public opinion. However, he did not do any of these things, because he was keen to grab the caliphate after Uthman and could not think of anything else.

From the very day on which Uthman called a conference of his confidants, which was also attended by Mu`awiya, and which ended without taking any decision, Mu`awiya decided finally to seize the caliphate, because he became sure that Uthman would be killed. As Syria was in his hands and the inhabitants of that region were obedient to him, he realized that if Uthman was killed he would acquire the best weapon (viz. vengeance of the murder of Uthman) to achieve his purpose.

He also knew that amongst the governors of Uthman none was as powerful and as competent to mobilize an army by threatening the elders and chiefs of the tribes as he himself was. Hence, on that very day he decided to become the caliph one day and became active towards achieving his goal. He himself said once: “None is as powerful and as competent to rule as I am. Umar appointed me as governor and was also satisfied with my conduct”.

Mu`awiya was sure of Uthman's murder and he also possessed sufficient power in Syria to seize the caliphate.

Allama Ya`qubi writes that when the insurgents tightened the siege of Uthman's house, he wrote a letter to Mu`awiya asking him to come to his help. Mu`awiya left Damascus with a large army, but when he reached the Syrian border he left the army there, saying that he would in the first instance meet the Commander of the Faithful himself to assess the situation. He then reached Madina and met Uthman. The latter asked him as to where his army was. He said in reply: “I have left the army behind because, in the first instance, I wanted to hold consultations with you. I shall now return and shall meet you again

along with the army". Upon this Uthman said: "O Mu`awiya! That is not true. The fact is that you want me to be murdered so that you may be in a position to claim that you are entitled to avenge my blood. Go at once and bring the people to help me".

When quite some time had passed since the murder of Uthman, Mu`awiya came to Madina and visited Uthman's house. Uthman's daughter Ayesha then remembered her father and began crying. Mu`awiya consoled her and began crying. He said: "Dear niece! The people have become obedient to me and I have given them peace. I have displayed forbearance under which anger was hidden and they showed obedience which had enmity and rancour under it. Every man has a sword in his hand and he also knows who his supporters are. If we deceive them they too will deceive us and it cannot be said as to who will win. You should be satisfied that at present you are called the daughter of the Commander of the Faithful Uthman and niece of the Commander of the Faithful Mu`awiya. If I rise to take revenge on your behalf and consequently I am deprived of government you will become an ordinary woman".

Hence, when Mu`awiya himself became the Commander of the Faithful and consequently Uthman's daughter became the niece of the Commander of the Faithful he ceased to think or talk about Uthman, although, so long as the caliphate remained with Ali, Uthman's murder was the most burning topic with him. Now the government was with Mu`awiya and he had acquired an opportunity to fulfil his father Abu Sufyan's wish which he had expressed when Uthman had assumed the caliphate. Abu Sufyan had said: "O children of Umayyah! Play with this government as children play with a ball. I swear that I have always been desirous of this government for you. Now it will go down to your children as inheritance".

Evidently, after Mu`awiya the caliphate was to go to Yazid and then to other children of Bani Umayyah.

In the letters written by Ali to Mu`awiya he has mentioned clearly that when Uthman sought help from Mu`awiya he did not accede to his request. He neither came himself nor sent any army to defend Uthman. In a letter to Mu`awiya he says:

"Then you have mentioned the matter about me and Uthman. You are entitled to get a reply in this behalf, because you are related to him. Well, then tell me (correctly) as to who out of us two was more inimical towards him and who provided means for his death? He who offered help which was refused by Uthman, or he from whom he sought help and who failed to help him and provided means of his death till death overtook him in the manner in which it was destined for him".

In another letter Ali writes: "You helped Uthman when helping him served your own interests and refrained from helping him when Uthman was likely to benefit". (What is meant by Ali's above remarks is that Mu'awiya stood in support of Uthman after his death, because he could collect people in his own interest by raising the slogan of vengeance of Uthman's murder but when Uthman was alive and his help could be beneficial to him he withheld it. Uthman remained besieged and Mu`awiya did not allow his army to proceed to Madina to defend him).

Whatever has been said above about Bani Umayyah and their prominent persons like Mu`awiya and

Marwan in connection with Uthman's murder can also be said about other persons mentioned above. In fact the same things can be said about the enemies of Ali and those who conspired against him. Those persons were responsible for Uthman's murder and not Ali. It is possible that there might be some persons who did not smear their hands with Uthman's blood but it is an undeniable fact that they were pleased when he met his death.

Amr ibn al-Aas, who had a great hand in hatching conspiracies against Ali and slandering him, had instigated everyone he met to rise against Uthman and had encouraged the people to kill him, because he had dismissed him from the governorship of Egypt. He himself used to say: "Not to talk of the dignitaries and the chiefs I instigated even the herdsmen to rise against Uthman".

When the disturbances broke out in Madina he went away to Palestine where he had built a palace. One day while he was sitting in his palace with his two sons named Muhammad and Abdullah a rider was seen coming from the side of Madina. People made enquiries from him about Uthman and he told them that he had been assassinated. Thereupon Amr ibn al-Aas said: "I am Abdullah. When I scratch a wound I ensure that blood comes out of it"! (He meant to say that he instigated the people to rise against Uthman as a result of which he (Uthman) lost his life).

Talha bin Ubaidullah, who first took oath of allegiance to Ali, and then fought against him on the pretext of avenging Uthman's murder was another such person. He took an active part in inciting the people to rise against Uthman. It has been narrated that Uthman sought assistance from Ali against Talha a number of times and Ali always acceded to his request. On one such occasion Ali went to Talha and saw that a large number of insurgents were gathered round him. He felt that Talha had a great hand in Uthman being besieged and he (Talha) was thinking of doing away with him.

Ali reprimanded him and said: "O Talha! What treatment have you meted out to Uthman?"He also endeavoured to restrain Talha from his activities but he declined to act on Ali's advice. Ali then went to the Public Treasury and desired that it might be opened. Keys were not, however, available. The door of the treasury was then broken under his instructions and he divided the entire money found in it, amongst those whom Talha had collected to kill Uthman. When Uthman came to know about it he was very happy and realized (although at a very late stage) that none else was as sympathetic and sincere, and capable of solving the problems of the Muslims, as Ali.

Then Talha came to Uthman and apalogized to him and said: "I repent before God. I had decided to perform an act but God intervened". Uthman said: "You have not come as a repentant, but like one who has become helpless. May God punish you!" (Tarikh al-Kamil, v.3, p.7. Tarikh Tabari, v.6, p. 154. Tarikh Ibn Khaldun, v.2, p.297).

Tabari narrates that as soon as the insurgents besieged the house of Uthman Talha began getting ready to become the caliph. He was certain that after Uthman the people would choose him as the next caliph. The first action taken by him was that he assumed control over the Public Treasury, obtained its keys,

and appointed his watchmen to guard it.

When the siege of his house became serious Uthman said, “God! Help me against Talha. He has incited the people to revolt against me. I swear by God that I hope, he will not attain to the caliphate and will lose his life also”. This sentence uttered by Uthman shows that Talha wanted to finish him and to become the caliph himself. Uthman had given freedom to Talha to utilize the property of the Public Treasury in any manner he liked, but he was a man who could not be satisfied with anything lesser than the caliphate. Uthman used to utter this sentence time and again during the last days of the siege of his house: “Woe betide Talha! I gave him so much gold and now he is thirsty for my blood”.

Those who have recorded the events related to the siege of Uthman's house have said that on the day on which Uthman was killed Talha had veiled his face and was shooting arrows secretly towards Uthman. It has also been related that when the besiegers could not find a way to enter the house, Talha arranged their entry from an adjoining house belonging to an Ansar and then they killed Uthman.

Tabari has narrated through Hakim bin Jabir that when Uthman's house had been besieged Ali said to Talha: “I ask you for God's sake to save Uthman from the people”. Talha replied: “By God this is not possible until and unless Bani Umayyah liquidate the entire debt”. (Tarikh Tabari, Vol.5, p.139).

After Uthman's assassination Ali used to say: “May God curse Ibn Sa`abah (Talha)! Uthman gave him so much and he (in return) behaved towards him like this”.

A remark of Ali about Talha shows that he was the person who incited the people most to revolt against Uthman and he was more keen than anyone else to see Uthman killed. He says: “By God Talha hurriedly put forth a demand for avenging the murder of Uthman lest revenge might be taken on him, because he, too, was involved in the matter. None was more thirsty for Uthman's blood than he. By ostensibly claiming revenge he tried to mislead the people so that the reality might remain hidden and the people might be involved in doubt”.

As regards Zubayr bin Awam it has been narrated that he did not do anything to turn away the insurgents from Uthman, rather it is said that his sympathies were with the insurgents. The policy adopted by him with regard to Uthman shows that he too desired that he might be finished as early as possible and he was very hopeful of becoming the next caliph. He told Ali openly that he wanted the caliphate for himself. When Ali asked him a few moments before the commencement of the Battle of the Camel as to how he had come there he replied: “You have been the cause of my arrival here. I do not consider you fit to be a caliph nor do I consider anyone else to be more deserving for this office than myself”.

Every student of history knows how vehemently Ayesha instigated revolt against Uthman. She often criticized him very severely and incited the people to kill him. She was annoyed with him from the very day he reduced her stipend and was always seeking an opportunity to harm him. One day she heard him delivering a speech from the pulpit of the prophet. She immediately took out a shirt of the prophet

and showing it to the people said with a loud voice: “O Muslims! The shirt of the prophet has not yet worn out and Uthman has corrupted his ***Sunnah”.***

Ibn Abi'l Hadid says on the authority of his contemporary scholars that Ayesha instigated every person she met to rise against Uthman. He further says: “Ayesha took out a piece of the prophet's dress and suspended it on a wall in her house. Whoever came to see her she said to him: “The dress of the prophet has not yet worn out but Uthman has polluted and ruined his ***Sunnah”.***

Balazari says: “Once Ibn Abbas chanced to meet Ayesha. That year Uthman had appointed him as the Amir of Hajj. Ayesha said to him openly: “O Ibn Abbas! God has given you intellect, wisdom and power of speech. Make the people turn away from this rebel (Uthman)”.

Balazari has quoted a sentence of Ayesha which shows that she hated Uthman more than anyone else can hate another human being. She said to Marwan: “O Marwan! I wish that Uthman had been in one of my bags so that I might have picked up that bag myself and drowned it into the sea”. She used to say very often: “Kill Na`athal. Na`athal has become an infidel”.

Ayesha so much wished Uthman's death that she began asking the people openly to kill him. It was because of this that she was sure that after Uthman's death Talha and not Ali would become the caliph. This is proved by the fact that when the news of Uthman's assassination was communicated to her at Mecca she said at once: “A curse upon Na`athal! Very good, O man with the fingers! Very good Abu Shabal! What a great man you are, O my cousin! It appears as if I can see with my own eyes his fingers and the people taking oath of allegiance to him”.

The man with the fingers means Talha. His fingers were cut off in the Battle of Ohad and from that day onwards he was called the man with the fingers.

When Talha's son Muhammad was questioned about the details of Uthman's murder he accused his father as well as Ayesha of being involved in it. The author of Al-Badr wa al-Tarikh says: “The greatest enemies of Uthman were Talha, Zubayr and Ayesha”.

There were many other dignitaries who instigated revolt against Uthman and thus participated in his murder. For instance when Abdur Rahman bin Awf whose wealth had increased many times during the period of Uthman fell ill, and the people went to enquire about his health he said to them: “Do away with Uthman before he assumes strength”. Among the enemies of Islam who instigated the people to rise against Uthman were also included many persons who later fought against Ali, and demanded revenge on him for the murder of Uthman.

The author of ***`Halif Makhzum'*** writes in his book: “Those of the Quraysh who were Uthman's fell enemies became his supporters after his death, and possibly the role of Ayesha in this tragedy is a clear example of being more dreadfully contradictory as compared with that of the greedy Qurayshites. She openly instigated the people to kill Uthman because she hoped that the government would then return to

the Family of Tayim (Ayesha's family) and her cousin Talha would become the caliph.

Uthman was killed by Talba, Zubayr and Sa`d bin Abi Waqas. He was killed by Mu`awiya and his party through their wealth and conspiracies. They left him in the lurch. He was killed by Marwan and his descendants and the friends of Bani Mu`iz, on account of their egotism, and their failing to give any importance to Uthman's affairs.

However, when Uthman was killed and the Muslims selected Ali unanimously as the new caliph all these persons suddenly changed their attitude. The same Uthman who was called a tyrant and an infidel during his lifetime begun to be called by them an oppressed person and a martyr after his death".

It will not be out of place to mention here the sentences which were uttered by Sa`id bin Aas and Mughayrah bin Sho`ba when they met Ayesha and her army at Khaybar while she was going from Mecca to Basra to fight against the army of Ali. What they said shows clearly that Talha and Zubayr were fully responsible for Uthman's murder. On that occasion Sa`id met Ayesha and the following coversation took place between them:

Sa`id: O Mother of the Faithful! Where are you going?
Ayesha: I am going to Basra.
Sa`id: What for?
Ayesha: To take revenge on the murderers of Uthman.
Sa`id: The murderers of Uthman are already with you. Why don't you kill them?

Then Sa`id addressed Marwan and they conversed as follows:
Sa`id: Where are you going?
Marwan: I am going to Basra.
Sa`id: What will you do there? Marwan: I shall take revenge on the murderers of Uthman.

Sa`id: The murderers of Uthman are already with you.
He has been killed by Talha and Zubayr. They coveted the caliphate themselves. However, when they were vanquished (i.e. when people took the allegiance to Ali) they said: "We shall wash away blood with blood and atone for our sins with repentance".

Then Mughayrah addressed the people thus: "If you have come to accompany the Mother of the Faithful it will be better for you if you return along with her. And if your anger is on account of Uthman's murder, you should know that these very chiefs of yours have killed Uthman.
And if you are annoyed with Ali for some cause let me know what that cause is. I ask you for God's sake not to create two disturbances in one year". (Al-Imamat wa al-Siyasah, Vol.1, p.58).

* * * * * * * *

This was the method and the conduct of the persons who instigated revolt against Uthman and caused

his death. And when Uthman was murdered they procured his shirt and rose to claim revenge on Ali. As regards Ali we have already explained his position during the episode, described earlier.

As we have stated above Uthman was pessimistic about Ali. Marwan advised Uthman time and again to kill Ali and other companions as soon as an opportunity was found. His object was that these magnanimous persons who watched and criticized the nefarious activities of Bani Umayyah should depart from the scene so that they (i.e. Bani Umayyah) might do what they liked and there should be none to find fault with them. However, Ali was too magnanimous and noble-minded a person to entertain personal grudge in his mind for anyone.

Ali was much above those petty considerations, that he should have entertained grudge against Uthman on account of his not consulting him, and should have become happy if Uthman favoured him. Distance from Uthman and his proximity were immaterial to him. The things for which Imam Ali was anxious were Islam and public welfare. He always avoided contention, unless it was necessary to resort to it to get rid of tyranny and establish equity and justice.

Hence, whenever it was possible for Ali to give useful advice to Uthman he did not withhold his sincere advice, even though it might have been unpleasant to Uthman's favourites. Nor did he show laxity in helping Uthman, turning away his enemies from him and saving him from the jaws of death. People approached Ali many times with the request that he might assume the caliphate himself but he turned down their request very sternly and dismissed them from his presence. He restrained people many times from creating disturbance, and saved Uthman from his own favourites and associates who were themselves the root-cause of all the troubles.

We have already explained in the foregoing pages how Ali assisted Uthman when the latter's house had been besieged by the insurgents although Ali's action must have displeased the advisers and associates of Uthman.

It was Ali's ardent wish that the gulf of differences between the insurgents and Uthman should not widen and no untoward incident, which might harm the Muslims should take place. He sincerely believed that bloodshed was not the only remedy for improving the conditions. They could achieve their purpose without resorting to bloodshed.

It is not possible to imagine how magnanimous and noble-minded Ali was. When Uthman's house had been besieged by the insurgents he at times asked Ali to leave Madina and after his departure he felt ashamed and sent a messenger to call him back. Ali complied with his instruc- tions every time and never asked him why he wanted him to leave Madina and why he wanted him to come back. It was Ali's spiritual loftiness that he was always kind to others.

Uthman asked Ali to go away from Madina so that he might not be present before his devotees, and they might not hear his name. He called him back so that he might advise the insurgents and save him from them. This happened a number of times Once when Ibn Abbas was deputed to convey the caliph's

message to Ali to leave Madina Ali said: “O Ibn Abbas! Uthman wants to make me a camel which carries water to and fro. He first asked me to leave Madina, and then he asked me to come back. And now he has sent a message that I should go away from here. By God I have defended him so much that I fear I may be treated to be a sinner”.

Muhammad bin Hanafiya reports him to have said: “If Uthman orders me to go away I shall obey him”. He said this only to protect Islam and to eliminate the causes of mischief.

The following sentence appearing in a letter written by Imam Ali to Mu`awiya fully depicts his innocence as regards Uthman's murder. “You want to take revenge on me for something in which neither my hands nor my tongue are involved. I gave him suggestions and showed him the right path. If that is my offence then it often happens that one is blamed unjustly for the sins which have not been committed by him”.

Ali helped Uthman during his lifetime and was very sympathetic to him even after his death. However, when Uthman was killed some persons accused Ali unjustly of having taken part in his murder. Muhammad bin Sirin has remarked very correctly when he says: “I am not aware whether anyone accused Ali of having participated in the murder of Uthman till the oath of allegiance was taken to him. Such a blame was levelled against him when the oath had been taken”.

Source URL:
https://www.al-islam.org/voice-human-justice-sautul-adalatil-insaniyah-george-jordac/great-conspiracy#comment-0