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3. Reddah (Heresy)

The opponents of Abu Bakr, outside the capital, were called 'Heretics,' and the wars fought against them were camouflaged as holy.

Heresy in Islam

Heresy is Irtidad in Arabic meaning 'turn.' The Holy Qur'an says,

"When the errand boy laid Joseph's shirt Jacob's face, his sight returned (Irtadda) to him."

The word 'Radda' is also used in the Qur'an to mean 'turn away from religion' as in the following verse;

"Believers, if you listen to a group of those to whom the Scriptures were given in the past, they will turn you (Yaruddoukom) into unbelievers despite your faith."

Again in this verse : "Believers, if any of you turns away (Yartadda) from his religion, God will bring forth people whom He loves and who love Him. They are lenient towards believers and strict with unbelievers."

We also read in the Qur'an: "They fight with you so as to turn you away (Yaroddukom) from your religion, and if you give up your faith, and then die, your work will come to nothing." But the word 'Irtadda' has been associated so often with heresy, that nothing but heresy comes to mind when it is used.

Heretics in the Prophet's time

Some Muslims turned away from Islam during Muhammad's time such as the following: Abdullah Bin Abi Sarh.

Abdullah was one of the scribers of the 'Inspired' Qur'an, who ran back to Mecca from Medina. He used to tell Quraish, that he wrote different words, to those which Muhammad dictated. For instance when Muhammad said, "God is all knowing and wise," Abdullah asked if he could write — "God is almighty and wise." Muhammad would say "That is just as applicable."

On the day he conquered Mecca, Muhammad said, "The blood of Abdullah is worthless, and if even he sought sanctuary at the Ka‘ba, he must be killed." ‘Othman hid him, and later took him to the Prophet asking pardon, which was granted.

Another heretic was ‘Obaidullah Bin Jahsh the husband of Umm Habiba, who emigrated to Ethiopia. He was converted to Christianity, and died there as a Christian.

Abdullah Bin Khatal was another heretic who was murdered whilst holding the cover of the Holy Shrine of Ka‘ba, seeking sanctuary.

Heresy in Abu Bakr's time

The soul searing news of the death of the Prophet, spread swiftly throughout the Arabian peninsula. Those tribes who,. so far, had not embraced Islam, rejoiced, and continued their activities against Islam. The Muslims tribes also became restless because they had heard that some of the companions of the Prophet, because of party politics, were fighting one another for the position of the Caliphate.

The disapproval of the relatives of the Prophet, Bani Hashim's, and the opposition of Sa‘d, the chief of the Khazraj tribe, to Abu Bakr as Caliph, caused some Muslim tribes to suspect the Caliphate office. They did not renounce their faith, nor did they reject prayer, or object to paying tax, they only refused to pay the due tax to Abu Bakr's government. These opponents were called heretics and they were to be eliminated by wars, camouflaged as holy.

After the destruction of their Muslim opponents, the government fought the pagan tribes and the false prophets and their organizations. Finally, expeditions were sent outside Arabia. All those battles fought in Abu Bakr's time, were called Reddah, (war against heretics). So the Muslim opponents of Abu Bakr outside Medina, were called ‘Mortaddin' (Heretics).

Dr. Hassan Ebrahim supported this idea in his book The History of Islamic Politics page 251 reads — "After the Prophet of God passed away and his death was confirmed, some Muslims hesitated about the truth of Islam, and some were afraid that the Quraish, or indeed any other tribe, could come to power and form a dictator state.

They had realized that only the Prophet of God was infallible, and any other person who succeeded him, would not have the characteristic, which allowed him to treat all men, like the teeth of a comb, as equals. Therefore they suspected, that if the successor of the Prophet favored his own family and tribe, and under– estimated the other tribes, it would destroy Islamic social justice.

We guess this because we see that, after the Prophet, each Arab selfishly supported his own family tribe, and the Arab's old natural way, returned. In Medina the Ansars (Helpers) were afraid that the Muhajirs (Immigrants) and the Quraish tribe would come to power. These two were suspicious of each other. The Ansars wanted a coalition government.

The Muhajirs wanted the chief to be from their tribe, and the assistant chief from the Ansars. The Aws and Khazraj — sub-divisions of the Ansars, betrayed each other during the election of the Caliph.

"Mecca was no better than Medina as the election caused tribal conflict there as well. Banu Hashim's disagreed with Abu Bakr .as Caliph, ‘Ali refused to support Abu Bakr and Abu Sufyan tried to persuade ‘Ali to arrange a coup d'etat.

"Finally the Muhajirs, Ansars and Quraish, who were pioneers in Islam and supporters of Islam, and relatives of the Prophet, could not unite to form a government peacefully. This made other Arab tribes disillusioned, and finally they gave up hope of having any vote, or chance in the government.

Hence most of them objected to Abu Bakr as Caliph and refused to pay him the due alms tax. Some foreign scholars take this as heresy, and as evidence of the advance of Islam by the sword in Arabia. That is not true however, because those people whom Abu Bakr fought as heretics, had remained faithful to Islam. They were of two groups.

1. The group who believed that the alms tax was the Prophet's levy, and after his death no one was entitled to ask for it; so they refused to pay it to Abu Bakr — and for this he fought them. ‘Omar pleaded on behalf of those people saying, "The Prophet used to say, ‘I fight people until they believe in one God, and anybody who believes in God, his blood and belongings will be protected."

2. The group who did not believe in the faith. In fact they were not Muslims. The Islamic state at Abu Bakr's time cared about only carrying out death sentences, and was not concerned about heretics returning to Islam."

Yet, according to Islam, as pointed out by Dr. Hassan Ebrahim, "Any heretic must have three days to discuss his views with the religious authorities. Hence — ‘Let accusations be proved before he perishes, and he who remains safe does so by proof."

To clear up the matter, we refer to some views by Sunnis leaders. "Imam Abu Hanifah says: ‘The shortest time allowed for a person to make up his mind is three days. If the heretic asks for grace, give him three days to discuss points.”

"Imam Malik says: ‘A heretic, be he slave or free, man or woman, give him three days from the day proven to be heretic. He can have food and must not be tortured.”

"Imam Shafe‘i says: ‘Heretic, man or woman, must be respected because he or she was a Muslim sometime. Some say give him or her, three days grace.’

"Imam Hanbal says: ‘Heretics, men or women, adult and if not insane must be invited to Islam for three days.’

"As well as the above views, it is not right to say that a Muslim has renounced his faith just by guess

work, unless every Muslim says he is a heretic. Some Muslim scholars have said that if a man is one percent Muslim, it is not right to hold that man as a heretic unless it is proven that he is."

This is the end of Dr. Hassan Ebrahim's saying in the book of History of Islamic Politics.

Ibn Kathir in his book Albedaya Wannehaya, vol.6, p.311 says, "All the narrators, except Ibn Majah have recorded that according to Abi Horayra, ‘Omar objected to Abu Bakr fighting people, saying that the Prophet protected the soul and belongings of anyone who confessed to the oneness of God and the apostleship of Muhammad, unless they were found guilty.

Abu Bakr replied, ‘By God, I will fight those who do not pay me the tax which were paying to the Prophet of God. Let it be a camel or a foot-tether of a camel. By God, I will fight anybody who differs between paying tax and saying prayers. I will fight until they give me the due tax which they gave to the Prophet.' ‘Omar said, ‘When I saw Abu Bakr's determination to fight, I understood that he was right.' "

According to Tabari (vol.2, p.474) heretics called on Abu Bakr in groups, agreeing to the prayers, but against paying tax. Abu Bakr would not accept their views and sent them away. Ibn Kathir in Albedaya Wannehaya (vol.6, p.311) says that groups of Arabs were coming to Medina who accepted the prayers but rejected the tax. There were some who did not want to pay tax to Abu Bakr, some of them were reciting this verse:

When the Prophet was among us we were obedient, But Abu Bakr's reign is a peculiar incident, Which has broken our back. We will rise, Yet, he may make his son Caliph when he dies.

In Tabari (vol.2, p.48) Saif has recorded from Abi Makhnaf that the horsemen of the Tay Tribe made remarks about the horsemen of the Asad and Fazareh tribes, when they passed one another. But there were no clashes between them. Asads and Fazarehs men used to say, "We will not agree with Abul-Fasil" (Nickname of Abu Bakr, meaning the father of the baby camel). The horsemen of the Tay Tribe would reply,

"We are sure you will agree with Abul-Fahl al-Akbar." (Meaning the father of the big camel, the great man).

From the above story it is understood that the heresy in Abu Bakr's time was not rejecting the faith, but in abstaining from paying tax to Abu Bakr.

Since the defeated parties were Badouins and Nomads, they had no chance to rule; but their opponents, the then rulers, had power in their hands for a long time, including the period in which the history of this time was written.

Also the history of the events which has reached us are recorded by their authority. It is up to us to investigate the truth of those stories written about the defeated people.

Tabari in his book (vol.6, p.461) has recorded from Saif that Arabs rejected their faith after Abu Bakr became Caliph. Heresy was the general trend of the day, but there were tribes where only a part became heretical. Only the tribes of Quraish and Thaqif remained faithful.

Saif has surpassed ‘Antara Bin Shaddad and other fiction writers in imagination. The heroes of Saif's stories walk on the waters without wetting their feet. They converse with wild animals — angels communicate with them — they bring forth fountains from stones in the desert. Moreover, Saif has told his stories in such a way as to please the then rulers, and to conceal the fact they were unpopular.

To show in what manner Saif has written his stories, we shall reproduce some of them from his book al-Fotouh Wal- Reddah recorded in Tabari’s book.

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