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Lesson 17: Sporadic Uprisings

Most of these uprisings were staged without prior organization and based on individual decisions against the tyranny of caliphs and rulers toward the Shi'ah and 'Alawis. Mostly reactionary and intransigent in nature, the most important of these uprisings were the following:

a. The Uprising of Shahid Fakh

It was Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Hasani (known as Shahid Fakh) who revolted during the caliphate of the 'Abbasid caliph Hadi. His uprising was against the extreme cruelties of the caliph of the time vis-à-vis the Shi'ah and 'Alawis. Narrates Ya'qubi, "The 'Abbasid caliph Musa al-Hadi was pursuing the Talibis. He seriously threatened them, curtailing their stipends and grants, and wrote to {the rulers of} the different regions and districts to be harsh toward the Talibis."[1]

'Abbasid caliph Hadi had also appointed as ruler of Medina a person from among the descendants of 'Umar who was very harsh against the Talibis, interrogating them daily. It was in protest of these cruelties that Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Hasani rose up and ordered the recital of "*hayya 'ala khayri'l-'amal*" {"Come to the best of deeds"} in the *adhan* {call to prayer} in Medina, asking the people to give their allegiance on the basis of the Book of God and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (S), and called on them to the leadership of the chosen one from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad (S).

His policy was agreed upon by Imam al-Kazim (*'a*) though the Imam said that he will be killed.[2] For this reason, the Zaydis kept aloof from him and he along with less than 500 men stood against the 'Abbasid army under the command of Sulayman ibn Abi Ja'far, and in the end, he and a number of his companions attained martyrdom in a place between Mecca and Medina called "Fakh".[3]

Imam ar-Ridha (*'a*) said, "besides Karbala' there was no tragedy more severe and tragic than {the tragedy in} Fakh."[4]

In general, 'Alawis leaders, with the exception of Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah Nafs az-Zakiyyah, did not possess popularity. The Imami Shi'ah and companions of the pure Imams (*'a*), with the exception of only

a few, did not participate in those uprisings.

b. The Uprising of Muhammad ibn al-Qasim

Muhammad ibn al-Qasim's revolt had taken place in 219 AH. He was a descendant of Imam as-Sajjad (*'a*), a resident of Kufah, and had been regarded as one of the ascetic, devoted and pious 'Alawis and *sadat*. The reason behind his uprising was the pressure exerted by Mu'tasim against him and as such, he was compelled to leave Kufah for Khurasan. As Mas'udi says,

In this year, that is, 219 AH, Mu'tasim threatened Muhammad ibn al-Qasim. He was truly ascetic and pious and when Mu'tasim threatened him, he went to Khurasan. He stayed in the cities of Khurasan such as Marv, Sarkhis, Taleqan, and Nasa.[5]

As narrated by Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, a population of around forty thousand men gathered around him. In spite of this, his uprising did not succeed and this huge population deserted him and in the end, he was arrested by the Tahiris, sent to Samarra and imprisoned.[6] Of course, he was freed by the Shi'ah and his followers, but after that there was no news of him and he passed away secretly.[7]

c. The Uprising of Yahya ibn 'Umar at-Talibi

Yahya ibn 'Umar at-Talibi, a descendant of Ja'far ibn Abi Talib at-Tayyar, enjoyed an unprecedented position among the people of Kufah on account of his asceticism and piety. Because of the cruelty and belittlement of the 'Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil and the Turkish soldiers against him, he was forced to rise up in Kufah against them and when he was taking control of the helm of affairs, he implemented justice and equity. As such, he earned extraordinary popularity in Kufah, but his uprising was thwarted by Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Tahir. The people were in commotion when they were mourning for him.[8] As Mas'udi says, "People from near and far recited elegies for him, and the young and old cried for him."[9]

And as narrated by Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, in terms of elegy, none of the 'Alawis who had attained martyrdom during the 'Abbasid period equaled him in the number of poems recited for him.[10]

Factors behind the Failure of the Uprisings

Two factors behind the failure of these uprisings can be identified: weakness in leadership and lack of coordination and cohesion of the forces. In most cases, the leaders of these movements had no proper plan or program and their activity was not based on the correct Islamic standards. As such, most of these revolts were not endorsed by the infallible Imams (*'a*).

If ever some other uprisings whose leaders were competent figures ended in failure, it was because their plan and program were such that their defeat was predictable. Therefore, if the infallible Imam of the

time would openly endorse them, in case of the failure of the uprising, the basis of Shi‘ism and Imamate and the principal nucleus of the Shi‘ah forces will be in jeopardy.

On the other hand, the forces of the uprisings generally lacked coordination and cohesion. Although there were sincere and true Shi‘ah among them who remained faithful to the objective up to the point of death, most of these people did not believe in their objective, or they did not agree with the leaders of the ‘Alawis, and most of them abandoned their commander and leader at the scene of the battle. In this regard, ‘Allamah Ja‘far Murtadha writes:

The reason behind these failures is nothing except that the Zaydi uprisings were political movements par excellence, and their only peculiarity was that they were campaigning to follow anyone from among the descendants of the Prophet (S) who would brandish his sword against the government, and they lack the intellectual purity and ideologically strong beliefs emanating from the profundity of the soul and depth of conscience.

These (uprisings) were based on such a stupid feeling and shallow cultural awareness which are not even an amalgamation of emotion with reasoning and conscience that could constitute a firm foundation of commitment and mission. On account of this, these (uprisings) were sucked down into the whirlpool (of breakdown) and many lives were wasted along their path. Rather, contrary to the factors of defeat which stem from within the revolutionary forces, relying on such an emotional and intellectual force is like the thirty one's reliance on a mirage.

And it is exactly this point that clearly shows how a people would seriously and decisively encounter events and when the water was already turning the wheels of mill and the time for harvest nigh, they would incline toward "peaceful" and "quiet" life.[11]

Lesson 17: Summary

The sporadic uprisings were mostly without any prior planning, and were undertaken with one individual's decision. They were usually staged as a form of reaction to the cruelties of the tyrant caliphs and rulers. Among these uprising was that of Husayn ibn ‘Ali al-Hasani known as Shahid Fakh which was against the extreme harshness and cruelties of the ‘Abbasid caliph Hadi.

On account of the pressure exerted on him by the ‘Abbasid caliph Mu‘tasim, Muhammad ibn al-Qasim who was one of the ascetic and pious ‘Alawis, was compelled to go to Khurasan and stage an uprising there.

The revolt of Yahya ibn ‘Umar at-Talibi was also the results of the tyranny of the agents of the ‘Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil.

And as to why most of the uprisings of the ‘Alawis ended in failure, one must seek the reasons behind this in the weakness of leadership and the lack of cohesion of the forces.

Lesson 17: Questions

1. Briefly describe the sporadic uprisings.

2. What are the reasons behind the failures of these uprisings?

1. Ibn Wadhih, Tarikh al-Ya'qubi, 1st edition (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1414 AH), vol. 2, p. 404.
2. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyin (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 372.
3. Ibid., pp. 380-381.
4. Sayyid Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman Kiya'i-Gilani, Siraj al-Ansab (Qum: Manshurat Maktabah Ayatullah al-'Uzma al-Mar'ashi an-Najafi, 1409 AH), p. 66.
5. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Mas'udi, Murawwij adh-Dhahab (Beirut: Manshurat Mu'assasah al-A'lami Li'l-Matbu'at, 1411 AH), vol. 4, p. 60.
6. Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, pp. 464-467.
7. Murawwij adh-Dhahab, vol. 4, p. 60.
8. Ibid., p. 160.
9. Ibid.
10. Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, p. 511.
11. Sayyid Ja'far Murtada al-Amili, Zindigani-ye Siyasi-ye Imam Jawad ('a), trans. Sayyid Muhammad Husayni, 8th edition (Qum: Islamic Publications Office affiliated to the Society of Teachers of the Islamic Seminary in Qum, 1375 AHS), p. 19.

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