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Part 6: Arbitration - Apostates (Mariqeen) - Imam's Martyrdom

Imam 'Ali (a) tried all possible ways to avoid war but Muawiyah wanted nothing but war and at last, a battle was fought between the two parties. When Muawiyah sensed that his army was going to be defeated, he told Amr ibn al-Aas: "Can you think of some way to unite our men and divide the enemy?" Amr ibn al-Aas said: "Yes." Muawiyah said: "Tell me so that we may be saved."

Amr ibn al-Aas said: "The idea is to lift pages of Quran on points of spears and ask the people of Iraq to stop fighting. We would ask them to settle our dispute through Quran and the enemy's army would get divided. In this way, the Syrian army would become dominant."

Finally, the Syrian army raised Quran on points of spears and said: "O people of Iraq! Stop fighting and settle the dispute through the Book of Allah."

When the army of Imam 'Ali (a) saw this, they said: "We are beckoned by the Book of Allah." 'Ali (a) said: "O servants of God! Be steadfast on your path and keep on fighting for your right. Muawiyah, Amr ibn al-Aas and Ibn Abi Muit are neither religious nor people of Quran. I know them much better than you do. I have known them through their childhood, puberty and youth, till now. They raised the Quran only for the sake of deceiving you."

The majority said: "It is inappropriate to decline if the enemy is inviting us to Quran."

Imam 'Ali (a) said: "I am also fighting them so that they accept the verdicts of Quran. These people have disobeyed Allah."

However, the people of Iraq put their weapons down and refused to fight. At last Imam 'Ali (a) had to stop the fighting.

It was decided that both parties should select their representatives and together decide the proceedings.

Amr ibn al-Aas was the representative from Muawiyah's side and the people of Iraq insisted Abu Moosa Ashari to be their representative. Imam 'Ali (a) said: "You disobeyed me once when you refused to continue the battle. I don't want you to do it again. I don't trust Abu Moosa Ashari. My son, Hasan, will be my representative."

The people of Iraq objected saying: "He being your son is also a party." Imam 'Ali (a) said: "If you don't accept him, I appoint Abdullah ibn Abbas as my representative."

However, the people of Iraq were great fools and they said: "He is your cousin and Abu Moosa is not your relative in any way."

Imam 'Ali (a) said: "Abu Moosa is not trustworthy. He had always been on the forefront in opposing me and has separated people from me." But the people of Iraq were bent on appointing Abu Moosa. At last Imam 'Ali (a) said: "Do whatever you want."

After that an agreement was written down for the rulers. Some of its conditions are as follows:

This is an agreement between 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan.

1. We shall obey the commands of Allah

2. We shall abide by the Book of Allah

3. The rulers shall ponder over the book of Allah and settle the dispute through it.

4. If they don't find a solution from Quran they shall look for it in Prophetic Practice (*Sunnah*) common to us.

Then the opposing parties should guarantee the protection of the lives and properties of each other.[1] Senior persons from both sides signed the agreement and it was decided that the two rulers would meet each other in a place called Domastul Jindal and announce the verdict.

Imam 'Ali (a) came back to Kufa with his army and Muawiyah started for Damascus. When the delegates met on the said date at the place called Domastul Jindal, Amr ibn al-Aas told Abu Moosa Ashari: "Why don't you hand over the Caliphate to Muawiyah?" Abu Moosa replied: "Muawiyah is not worthy of Caliphate."

Amr ibn al-Aas said: "Don't you know that Uthman was killed while he was innocent?" Abu Moosa Ashari replied in affirmative. Amr ibn al-Aas said: "Muawiyah wants to avenge Uthman's death." Abu Moosa Ashari said: "Amr, the son of Uthman is alive and Muawiyah cannot be his heir in the presence of his son."

Amr ibn al-Aas said: "If you follow my words the practice of Umar ibn Khattab would be enlivened. Let my son, Abdullah become the Caliph."

Abu Moosa Ashari said: “Why shouldn’t I appoint Abdullah ibn Umar instead of your son?”

Amr ibn al-Aas said: “Abdullah ibn Umar is not worthy of Caliphate. We require a person for Caliphate who has two molars; he should eat with one and enable the people to eat with the other.”

Abu Moosa Ashari said: “I want to dismiss both ‘Ali and Muawiyah and give choice to Muslims to select their Caliph.”

Amr ibn al-Aas said: “I liked your decision. It would be better if we go and declare this in public.”

The delegates came to public and started their speech saying: “Finally, we have come to a conclusion which is purely for the benefit of the Ummah.”

Amr ibn al-Aas said: “Sure, you are right.”

Abdullah ibn Abbas told Abu Moosa Ashari: “Hold on! If you have come to a conclusion, ask Amr ibn al-Aas to come and speak to the public first. Probably you don’t know that you are dealing with a liar. Therefore avoid speaking first.”

Abu Moosa asked Amr ibn al-Aas to come forward make declaration. However, this cunning one said: “You are a great Companion of the Prophet. I cannot dare to precede you. You must declare in public.”

Abu Moosa Ashari was deceived by his words and announced: “O servants of God! We held a long discussion on this matter and came to a conclusion that we would dismiss both ‘Ali and Muawiyah. After that, it is up to the people to appoint whoever they want.”

Saying this Abu Moosa Ashari stepped away and Amr ibn al-Aas came forward and said: “O people! You heard what Abu Moosa Ashari said. He has dismissed ‘Ali, his companion and I accept it. Now I appoint Muawiyah to Caliphate because he is the heir of Uthman ibn Affan and an avenger of Uthman’s murder. He is the only person capable of Caliphate.”

Abu Moosa Ashari said: “O Amr ibn al-Aas! May God destroy you! You acted against the agreement. You are like a dog, which goes on barking.”

Amr ibn al-Aas said: “You are like a donkey loaded with books.” Syrians intended to punish Abu Moosa because he spoke much. People were on lookout for him but he hid somewhere. Later on, he went to Mecca.

This conclusion of the delegates was not in accordance with justice. Truth was killed by this decision. Abu Moosa expressed his enmity with Imam ‘Ali (a) by taking this decision. Amr ibn al-Aas deceived him because of his ignorance and simplicity. That is why Imam ‘Ali (a) had said when pages of Quran were raised: “This is a trick of enemy. Don’t get deceived by his words. Muawiyah, Amr ibn al-Aas and Ibn Abi Muit had no relation with holy Quran or religion.”

Character of Amr Ibn al-Aas

We would like to describe the character of Amr ibn al-Aas before discussing about Arbitration so that readers get more information about the 'right hand of Muawiyah'. The father of Amr, Aas al-Sahmi, was one of those who mimicked the Prophet and regarding him the Almighty Allah has said in Surah Kauthar:

«إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الأَبْتَرُ.»

Surely your enemy is the one who shall be without posterity.2

Ibn Khaldun writes thus about those who ridiculed the Prophet (*Mustahzi'een*): Quraish saw that the Prophet's uncle was helping him openly and he would not allow anyone to touch him. They made it a practice to immediately meet visitors of Mecca and tell them that they have a magician in Mecca who is a poet and he is also crazy. They used to ask the visitors to keep away from him. They had formed an entire group in order to hurt the Prophet. Rabi's two sons viz. Utbah and Shaybah, Uqbah ibn Abil Muit, Abu Sufyan, Hakam ibn Umayyah, Aas ibn wail and his two cousins viz. Nabia and Munabbah were the members of this group.

They used to ridicule the Prophet at every place. If they got an opportunity they used to hurt the Prophet physically also. The mother of Amr ibn al-Aas was known for her bad character and was notorious for sleeping with rich strangers. She also had a flag atop her house announcing her services as was a custom at that time.

When Amr was born, both Aas and Abu Sufyan began to claim that the child belonged to them. When the conflict increased, they decided to go to the mother and ask her. She said that he was the son of Aas.

On being asked why she mentioned Aas instead of Abu Sufyan, she said that Abu Sufyan was a miser and Aas used to spend more on her.

Mother's lap is the first school for a child and the mother's character affects the child. Amr had grown up on the milk of such a mother and under the care of a father who was a great enemy of the Prophet. When parents have such manners, how can the child be noble?3

Amr ibn al-Aas was one of the worst enemies of Islam during his youth he had participated from the side of disbelievers of Mecca in the Battle of Uhad. The poetic verses recited by him regarding the Battle of Uhad are very famous. When Amr saw that the Prophet was getting an upper hand in every place, he thought that his future was dark. He took to hypocrisy instead of being an open enemy.

Ibn Hisham has recorded the following words of Amr: "After we returned from the Battle of Confederates (*Ahzaab*) defeated, I gathered the people of Quraish who used to listen to me. I told them: I see that

Muhammad's power is increasing day by day. I think that we should go to King Negus. Muhammad will dominate our community soon. Therefore it is better for us to be under the rule of Negus than to be slaves of Muhammad. If our community dominates Muhammad, we would return."[4]

Amr ibn al-Aas was the same who stopped Uthman ibn Affan from punishing Ubaidullah ibn Amr. He told him: "It is not obligatory on you to avenge the death of Hurmuzan and Jufaina because you were not the ruler when they were killed by Ubaidullah."[5]

We are surprised at Amr ibn al-Aas how he considered that it was not the responsibility of Uthman to avenge the death of Hurmuzan and Jufaina because he was not the ruler when they were killed, but this same person was on the forefront in avenging the death of Uthman from Imam 'Ali (a), even though Imam 'Ali's (a) government was not established when Uthman was murdered?

Amr ibn al-Aas with Muawiyah

We have seen in the previous pages how Amr ibn al-Aas was a one of the bitterest enemies of Uthman and that he used to instigate everyone he met against Uthman. As per his own admission: "I instigated every shepherd I met against Uthman."

Amr had not supported Muawiyah for free. He had taken a huge amount for this purpose. Amr ibn al-Aas was the governor of Egypt during the time of the third Caliph. However, Uthman dismissed him and appointed Ibn Abi Sarah in his place. Amr ibn al-Aas was enraged at this and he quarreled with Uthman. Then he returned to his property in Palestine and lived there along with two sons. He used to instigate the locals against Uthman. Finally, a time came for which he had waited for. He got the news that Uthman was killed, 'Ali (a) had become the Caliph of the Muslims and Muawiyah has hoisted the flag of betrayal against the central government.

Muawiyah invited him to be his ally, and he asked Muawiyah to give in writing that he would make him the governor of Egypt. Muawiyah complied with his request and gave in writing that if he conquers Egypt, he would hand over its charge to him.

Amr discussed his future political life with his two sons. Abdullah said: "If you want to take a part any way, join 'Ali."

Amr told him: "If I join 'Ali, I would get no benefit from him. 'Ali would treat me like a common Muslim. On the other hand, if I go to Muawiyah he would give me lots of respect and would make me his chief advisor. He would hand over the charge of Egypt to me as promised."

His second son, Muhammad, advised him to join Muawiyah. Amr ibn al-Aas told Abdullah: "You have advised me to better my hereafter and Muhammad advised me to better my worldly life. The hereafter is credit and worldly life is cash. An intelligent person should leave credit and take cash."

Amr ibn al-Aas came to Muawiyah and told him: “It is a fact that we are not better than ‘Ali. We are opposing him for the sake of gaining this world.”[6]

Amr ibn al-Aas was Muawiyah’s representative in Arbitration.

The representative of Imam ‘Ali (a) was Abu Moosa Ashari who used to stop people from helping the Imam during his tenure as the governor of Kufa. At last, Imam ‘Ali (a) was forced to dismiss him.

Arbitration and the stand of ‘Ali (a)

It is necessary to know the reality of this Arbitration before understanding the stand of Imam ‘Ali (a) in this matter.

It is common belief of the entire Islamic Ummah that one should take guidance from Book of Allah and Prophetic Practice (*Sunnah*) in event of dispute and this is what Imam ‘Ali (a) proposed from the day one.

The foundation of the Imam’s government was laid on Quran and he behaved with his relatives and common people as prescribed by it. He held onto Quran tightly and followed its justice strictly. As a result, many people left him and joined his rivals, however, he always preferred the justice of Quran.

Imam ‘Ali (a) always supported the verdict of Quran and opposed Arbitration in the Battle of Siffeen because he knew that the enemy had raised Quran only for the sake of their own benefit.

The invitation for Arbitration was given by those who had always fought Quran and people of Quran. They had never followed Quran in their individual and collective lives.

Amr ibn al-Aas had not advised raising of Quran because he wanted to follow it but because he wanted to save himself from defeat.

The whole plan of raising holy Quran was made at night. A copy from Egypt was divided into five parts and they were raised on five different spears. Apart from this, all copies of Quran present in Muawiyah’s army were gathered at one place and each was raised on a spear.

The Syrians came to the Iraqi army at dawn lifting holy Quran on spears and the Iraqis were completely unaware of what the Syrians were carrying before light spread.

As soon as morning light spread everywhere, a Syrian commander, Abul Aawar al-Salmi mounted a horse and moved forward. He had kept the Quran on his head and he announced: “O people of Iraq! The Book of Allah shall decide between us.”

Upon this, Imam ‘Ali (a) said: “O servants of God! I am the first to accept the Book of Allah. However remember that these people only want to deceive you through Quran. They are weary of war and would

be defeated in a few moments. They have raised Quran only because they want to save themselves from death.

Even after knowing all these facts, I consider the book of Allah as supreme authority. I have come to fight Syrians in order to make them accept the commandments of Quran."[7]

Imam 'Ali (a) considered holy Quran as supreme authority in such conditions also. He told the son of Abu Sufyan:

"Remember that inequity and falsehood bring disgrace to a man in this world and in the Hereafter. The vicious character of a tyrant always betrays itself to those who carefully look into his actions. You must know that you can never get what has not been destined for you.

There are people who want to grab a thing without having any right or claim over it. To get the object they crave for, they try to interpret the commands of Allah to suit their purpose. But Allah has always given a lie to such people. Therefore, you should also fear the Day of Judgment, the day when only those who have done deeds deserving reward will be happy, and those, who have surrendered themselves to Satan and don't want to come out of its influence, will cut a sorry figure.

You invited me to let the Holy Book act as an arbitrator but you never believed that Book to be the Word of Allah. I, therefore, did not accept your invitation though I always accept the commands of that Book."

At another occasion, Imam 'Ali (a) told Muawiyah: "Allah has tested me through you and tested you through me. Each of us is a proof on other. You misinterpreted holy Quran for the sake of this world. You have asked me for a thing, in which neither my tongue nor my hands interfere.

You disobeyed me and asked the Syrians to do so. Your scholars deviated you and the rivals instigated people sitting in their houses against me."[8]

The above mentioned facts prove that Imam 'Ali (a) wanted the supreme authority of holy Quran. However, the circumstances in which Muawiyah invited him for Arbitration did not allow Imam 'Ali (a) to accept the invitation. Also Imam 'Ali (a) had objected to appointment of Abu Moosa Ashari as the representative.

Amr ibn al-Aas was the most appropriate person to represent Muawiyah, whereas Abu Moosa Ashari was the most inappropriate one from 'Ali's side. However, because of insistence of the people of Iraq, Imam 'Ali (a) had to accept him. Imam 'Ali (a) hoped that perhaps Abu Moosa would make up for his past mistakes during the meeting of delegates.

Imam 'Ali (a) thought that the delegates would discuss the following points:

1. Was Uthman murdered unlawfully?

2. And Muawiyah had the right to avenge the death of Uthman?

3. If Uthman was innocent, how should the Caliph proceed with the case of his murder legally?

However, the delegates did not discuss the real topic and Amr ibn al-Aas brainwashed Abu Moosa saying that it is better for the Ummah that both Imam 'Ali (a) and Muawiyah should be dismissed. Abu Moosa Ashari was caught in the trap laid by Amr ibn al-Aas because of his foolishness and enmity to Imam 'Ali (a). He did not sense the wickedness of Amr ibn al-Aas till the end. Amr ibn al-Aas took full advantage of a simple and ignorant Bedouin and turned the lost battle in his own favor.

Difficulties of 'Ali (a)

Khawarij came into being as a result of Arbitration. This group included extremist elements who did not care about logical reasoning and evidences.

Dr. Taha Husayn narrates the difficulties of Imam 'Ali (a) in the following words:

Khawarij had become a headache for Imam 'Ali (a). All Khawarij were not killed in the Battle of Nahrawan. Only a group of them was killed and the remaining lived in Kufa together. They also lived in Basra and the regions around Kufa and Basra.

They could not forget the killing of their brothers in the Battle of Nahrawan and it could not change their minds. It only increased their strength and they also got a terrific power whose source is hatred, jealousy and feeling of revenge.

The circumstances led the Khawarij to create such a front and a policy, from which they did not deviate in their long history. This policy was to oppose the caliphs, instigate people against them and not to support them in any matter. If they did not have power they invited people to their group and fought a battle secretly or openly by unsheathing their swords as soon as they gained power.

These people conspired against Imam 'Ali (a) from all sides in Kufa. They began deviating the thoughts and beliefs of the people, waiting in ambush. They did not offer prayer with Imam 'Ali (a). They did not listen to his sermons and talks and used to interrupt him on many occasions. In spite of all these things, they were happy with his verdict and did not fear getting arrested by him. They knew it very well that unless they provoke, they would not be troubled by Imam 'Ali (a) and their defects would not be exposed and they would continue to receive grants. They decided to make preparations for war with whatever grants they received.

The justice and forgiveness of Imam 'Ali (a) had raised the hopes of Khawarij. He was completely aware of their intentions. Occasionally, he used to point at his beard and forehead and say: "This would be stained by this." When he used to become wary of the disobedience of Companions, he used to say: "Why is the unfortunate one delaying it?"[9]

Often Khawarij came to him and expressed their thoughts openly. One day Harith ibn Rashid came to him and said: “God is the witness to the fact that I have neither obeyed you nor prayed behind you.”

Imam ‘Ali (a) said: “May God curse you, you have disobeyed your Lord. You have broken your oath and you are deceiving yourself. Why are you doing this?”

In spite of such open hostility, Imam ‘Ali (a) neither got angry with him nor arrested him, instead invited him for a debate with a hope that he returns to the right path.

Afterwards this man set out from Kufa at night with an intention of fighting. He and his companions met two persons on the way. They asked those two persons about their religion. One of them told that he was a Jew. He was spared considering that he was a protected citizen (*Zimmi*) of Islamic state. The other person was a non-Arab Muslim. He was asked about his opinion regarding Imam ‘Ali (a). When the person praised Imam ‘Ali (a), he was attacked by the group of Khawarij and killed on the spot.[10]

The allegiance breakers (*Nakitheen*), the unjust (*Qasiteen*) and the apostates (*Mariqeen*) were against Imam ‘Ali (a). In addition, he had to bear the treachery of his own men. Ubaidullah ibn Abbas was the governor of Imam ‘Ali (a) in Basra. He was also a cousin of Imam ‘Ali (a) and had a vast knowledge of religious and worldly matters. He had a special honor in Quraish in general and in Bani Hashim in particular. He also did not remain faithful to Imam ‘Ali (a).

Abul Aswad Duali was the treasurer of Muslim treasury in Basra. He wrote to Imam ‘Ali (a) regarding the financial irregularities of Ubaidullah Ibn Abbas. Imam ‘Ali (a) wrote to Ibn Abbas saying:

“I have come to know certain things about you. If they are true you have angered you Lord. You have been untrustworthy. You have disobeyed your Imam. Hence it is your duty to come to me with your accounts. Remember that the account of Allah is even stricter.”

Imam ‘Ali (a) never forgave financial discrepancies and did not bear being facile to the wealth of Muslims.

However, Ubaidullah Ibn Abbas left the governorship of Basra and went to Mecca instead of submitting the accounts. It is even more remorseful to know that he did not go from Basra empty-handed. Instead he took away the whole Muslim treasury with him. Bani Tameem decided to confront him. Fearing the circumstances, Ubaidullah took refuge with his uncles i.e. the tribe of Bani Azd. As a result, a war was about to start between Bani Azd and Bani Tameem. At last, Ubaidullah succeeded in taking the wealth away in spite of knowing that it did not belong to him.[11]

The Difficulties of Imam ‘Ali (a) increased by the day. The governor showed his distrust and enemies showed their opposition. In spite of these hopeless conditions, Imam ‘Ali (a) did not turn away from the right path. He did not deviate even a little bit from commandments of Quran. Calamities befell him one after the other but the lion of God had not learnt to fear in such times.

Imam ‘Ali (a) did not let the banner of truth bow down till his last breath. He accepted the oceans of calamities for the sake of right till Ibn Muljim, the accursed one martyred him. We should review the justice of Imam ‘Ali (a). He did not like being unjust to even his killer. He willed to his son: Provide good food to your prisoner. If I survive, only I would have the right to punish him or forgive him. If I die, do not strike him more than once because he struck me only once. Do not disfigure his body after killing him. Allah likes those who remain within the limits.

1. Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fit Tarikh, Vol. 3, Pg. 160-168
2. Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fit Tarikh, Vol. 2, Pg. 49-50
3. Ibn Khaldun, Kitabul Abru Diwan al-Mubtada wal Khabar, Vol. 2, Pg. 177; Abdul Fattah Abdul Maqsood, Al-Imam “Ali bin Abi Talib, Vol. 2, Pg. 270
4. Sirah Ibn Hisham, Vol. 2, Pg. 177
5. Abdul Fattah Abdul Maqsood, Al-Imam “Ali bin Abi Talib, Vol. 4, Pg. 83
6. Abbas Mahmood al-Aqqad, Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan, Pg. 53-55
7. Al-Dinawari, Al-Akhbaar al-Tiwaal, Pg. 191-192
8. Ibn Abil Hadid, Sharh Nahjul Balagha, Vol. 4, Pg. 113-160
9. A reference to Abdur Rahman Ibn Muljim
10. Dr. Taha Husayn, Al-Fitnah al-Kubra “Ali wa Banuh, Pg. 133
11. Al-Fitnah al-Kubra “Ali wa Banuh, Pg. 129

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