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Uthman, the Third Khalifa of the Muslims

Just before his death, Umar called Abu Talha Ansari, and said to him:

"God has given honor to Islam through you (the Ansar), and now you take your 50 armed men to watch the members of the electoral committee, and do not let them disperse without choosing a khalifa which they must do within three days."

The electors began their parleys in the house of Miswar bin Makhrama – the nephew of Abdur Rahman bin Auf. Abu Talha Ansari began his three-day long vigil. Amr bin Aas and Mughira bin Shaaba, also appeared at the door of the house of Miswar, eager to take part in the proceedings of the committee but the pickets of Abu Talha did not let them enter.

Because of the "special powers" Umar had given him, Abdur Rahman bin Auf considered himself the key figure of the electoral committee. In a size-up of the situation, he gathered that no one of the other five candidates was willing to withdraw his name from the contest, and everyone was determined to press his claim vigorously. He, therefore, quietly developed a strategy of his own, and then told the committee that he would withdraw his name from the list of candidates if it would, in return, allow him to act as chairman and coordinator of its meeting(s).

Other members agreed but Ali hesitated to give Abdur Rahman any extra powers. When others insisted that he too should agree, he said to him:

"I shall acknowledge you as chairman of the electoral committee if you give a pledge that you will not be a slave to your own lusts, and that your decision will be taken only to win the pleasure of God and His Messenger."

Abdur Rahman readily gave his pledge for doing so, and thus became the chairman of the committee. By withdrawing his candidacy, he won extra leverage with the other candidates, and cast himself in the role of a "king-maker."

Abdur Rahman held a series of meetings with other candidates in an attempt to find a satisfactory

solution of the problem but his efforts bore no fruit. The discussions of the other candidates during the first two days also ended in stalemate.

On the third and the last day, Abdur Rahman paid a visit to each member of the committee in his own house. In these private meetings, he asked each candidate whom he would like to see as khalifa if he himself were not elected. The answer was Uthman or Ali. This meant that the choice was narrowed down to these two men, one of whom had to become khalifa, but which one?

That evening, Abdur Rahman, the king-maker, called on his old friend, Amr bin Aas, explained to him his predicament, and added:

"I have been so perplexed in this matter that I have known no rest for three days. Today is the last day, and I still have found no answer to our problem. What is troubling me is the fear lest Ali becomes the caliph. And before Umar died, I gathered from his manner and attitude that he too was haunted by the same fear."

Amr bin Aas was much more skillful than Abdur Rahman or anyone else at the kind of game the latter was trying to play. He said: "I know the move that will checkmate Ali." He then explained the move to Abdur Rahman. The latter welcomed the bright idea and felt happy and confident that he would preclude Ali from becoming the caliph.

On the following morning, the Muslims assembled in the Mosque of the Prophet. It was a momentous day in their lives when they would know who their future sovereign was going to be. Presently the king-maker and other members of the electoral committee also arrived and took their seats. After a brief pause the king-maker rose. He made an announcement of the purpose of the gathering, underscored its importance, and called upon the Muslims to abide by the decision of the electoral committee which Umar had appointed.

The air was charged with tension, and every man was keyed up, ready as if to snap any moment. Abdur Rahman bin Auf, the king-maker, turned toward Ali, held his hand, and posed to him the following question:

"If we give you charge of the government of the Muslims, and put you in authority over their affairs, do you solemnly promise to act according to the Book of God, the Sunna of His Apostle, *and the precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar?"*

(The proviso to act according to the precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar was not stipulated by Umar himself. It was the "move" which Amr bin Aas had suggested to Abdur Rahman bin Auf. He knew that Ali would not accept it.)

Ali replied to the king-maker as follows:

"I shall act according to the Book of God, and the Sunna of His Apostle. As for following the precedents

of Abu Bakr and Umar, I have a judgment of my own, and I am going to use it."

Ali knew just what would happen next.

The king-maker let his hand fall. He then turned to Uthman, and repeated the same question to him. Uthman immediately agreed. Thereupon the king-maker himself became the first to give him his pledge of loyalty. He congratulated him on becoming the new khalifa, and signaled the others to give him their pledge of loyalty.

The khalifa had been chosen. The new khalifa of the Muslims was Uthman bin Affan.

Ali let caliphate slip from his hand but he did not compromise with a principle. He did not consider Abu Bakr and Umar lawful successors of Muhammad, and he refused to imitate them in anything.

R. V. C. Bodley

The six counselors appointed by Omar met as soon as the funeral was over. The caliphate was first offered to Ali with the condition that he govern according to the Koran, the traditions of Mohammed, and the regulations established by Abu Bakr and Umar. Ali accepted the first two conditions, and refused the third. The offer was, accordingly, withdrawn and Othman was approached with the same terms. Being less honest than Ali, he accepted them without demur." (*The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed, New York, 1946*)

Abdur Rahman bin Auf knew that no one among the companions had more knowledge of the Book of God, or was more attached to His Apostle than Ali. But when he invoked the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Apostle, in his offer of caliphate to the candidates, he was only playing for the "gallery."

His stipulation that Ali should act as per the commandments of Qur'an and should follow the Sunna of Muhammad, was tactical rather than philosophical; more cosmetic than basic. His real interest was in a commitment by Ali to follow the precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar, both of whom had made it possible for him and many others, to become rich and powerful.

Capitalism, that "hideous pagan idol" of the Times of Ignorance, and the other idols that the Quraysh worshipped in Makkah, had been given a burial by Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God. But after his death, the capitalist idol was exhumed, and was "reinstated" in Medina.

The capitalist system rapidly struck roots in the Muslim society, and they went so deep that it became impossible to eradicate them. After the death of Muhammad Mustafa, the capitalist system went on growing stronger and stronger.

All members of the panel appointed by Umar to select a khalifa, were capitalists except Ali. They knew that if Ali took charge of the government, he would strike the death blow to the capitalist system; would compel the capitalists to disgorge all the pelf they had already devoured, and would revive the pristine

simplicity and purity of the Islamic society just as it was in the times of Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God. The king-maker and the nouveaux riches had no desire to return to those days of austerity and self-denial.

But even if Umar had not wished to make Uthman his successor, and even if he had no preference for any candidate, and even if there had been no collusion between Abdur Rahman, the king-maker, and Amr bin Aas, Ali still could not become the caliph.

One thing all members of the electoral committee, and many other Muslims who made up the new aristocracy of the Arabs, dreaded most was to see a stern, firm and strong person like Ali at the helm of affairs. They also knew that Ali, inflexible with himself in matters of principle, would be inflexible with them, and that he would compel the whole umma to live in obedience to the imperatives of Qur'an.

But Uthman's style, manner, and performance, on the other hand, had been undeviatingly consistent in being so banal that they could be depended upon to confer mediocrity upon the khilafat. His mediocrity was going to be a guarantee that he would not tamper with the privileges and prerogatives of the electors. Safeguarding their interests, therefore, was more important for them than safeguarding the interests of Islam.

The merits of a candidate for the most important office in Islam did not figure anywhere in the king-maker's consideration. The truth is that the interests of Islam or the merits of a candidate were the least important factors in his calculations. His decision was dictated, not by the interests of Islam, but by his interest in the maintenance of the status quo. The tug inside the electoral committee, therefore, encompassed a trial of strength between the capitalist system and the Islamic socio-economic egalitarianism. Ali did what he could to defend egalitarianism but the odds were overwhelmingly against him.

Uthman's election as khalifa was a triumph of capitalism. Umar had conceived the plan of "Shura" (electoral committee), and he had charged Abdur Rahman bin Auf with the duty of implementing it. The latter, as chairman of the committee, made it a condition-precedent that a candidate for khilafat would obey not only the Book of God and would follow the Sunna of His Messenger, but also, would follow the regulations of Abu Bakr and Umar. He thus put the deeds of Abu Bakr and Umar at par with the Book of God and the Sunna of His Apostle.

Ali refused to equate the deeds of Abu Bakr and Umar with the Book of God and the Sunna of His Messenger. He refused to follow fallible men who were the political leaders of his time knowing that his refusal would cost him the throne of the empire of the Muslims. He spurned at that throne because the price being demanded from him for it, was a compromise with Truth and Justice. He declared publicly that the precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar were not acceptable to him. If their precedents were unacceptable to him, then their caliphate also must have been unacceptable to him.

This is conclusive proof that he did not take the oath of allegiance to them. But if Sunnis still insist that

Abu Bakr and Umar obtained the pledge of loyalty from him, then they must have taken it from him on the point of the bayonet.

Ali could have declared, just as Uthman did, that he was accepting the king-maker's conditions, and after taking the reins of power in his hand, he could have ignored them, again, just as Uthman did. Many politicians consider double-talk and double-cross a normal and recognized exercise in the game of stagecraft. But Ali did not. For him the ends did not justify the means. For him the means also had to be just as honorable and fair as the ends themselves.

Ali's Protest

Ali said to the king-maker:

"It is not the first time that you have deprived the heirs and the children of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, of their rights through treachery. For this you are answerable to God. But for me, it is better to put my trust in God Who alone is Just, Fair and Merciful."

The king-maker made some attempt at window-dressing for his role in the same manner as Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah had done after Abu Bakr's election in Saqifa but it was not long before he was cursing himself for his chicanery and duplicity in a matter upon which the future of Islam itself had depended.

Abdur Rahman bin Auf, the husband of Uthman's sister, lived long enough to see the fruits of his labors at kingmaking. He saw graft spreading its tentacles like an octopus over the empire of the Muslims, and he was "shocked" so much by the nepotism and the incompetence of the khalifa he had chosen that he declared that he would not talk with him (there was little else he could do then).

Sometime later, when he lay dying, Uthman came to see him but he did not acknowledge his greetings and turned his face toward the wall. He died in this state, without exchanging a word with the khalifa. Dr. Taha Husain of Egypt says in his book, *al-Fitna-tul-Kubra* (the Great Upheaval) that Abdur Rahman bin Auf died full of shame and remorse at what he had done as chairman of Umar's electoral committee.

The Protest of Ammar ibn Yasir

Ammar ibn Yasir, the companion and the beloved of Muhammad Mustafa, reproached Abdur Rahman and his cronies, saying:

"You have usurped the rights of the family of your Prophet, not once but repeatedly, and you have bestowed them upon people who are most unworthy."

Abu Sufyan's Congratulations to Uthman

When Uthman became khalifa, the happiness of the Banu Umayya knew no limits. Life for them, they knew, would be all cream and peaches thenceforth, and it was. Their leader, Abu Sufyan, now 90-years old and blind, came to congratulate the new khalifa, and gave him the following advice:

"It is after a long time that khilafat has come to us. Now kick it around like a ball, and use it to strengthen Banu Umayya. This new power which you now have in your hands, is everything. It is the only reality. Nothing else is real or important. Heaven and hell are nothing."

Abu Sufyan's "advice" to Uthman was the standard reflex to Islam of the Banu Umayya, and it was to remain unchanged throughout the century of their political domination except in the three and half years of the khilafat of Umar bin Abdul Aziz (R).

The selection of Uthman as khalifa once again underscored the truth of the adage that where there's money, there's power.

(Charles E. Hurwitz is a corporate raider who buys American companies and then strips their assets to pay his takeover debt. He rules a financial empire worth an estimated $8.5 billion in 1990. He once drained $60 million from the pension fund of the employees of a mill. To the demoralized employees, he reminded of a "fact of life." He said: "There's a little story about the Golden Rule. Those who have the gold, rule.")

The correlation of economic power and political power is much too patent to need any further delineation or emphasis. Umar chose the richest men in all Arabia as electors of a khalifa. The only elector who was not rich, was Ali. Umar did not want Ali to become the khalifa but he could not find any plausible reason to exclude him from his electoral committee. Excluding Ali would have made his hatred of and hostility to the family and clan of Muhammad Mustafa too obvious.

Umar lived in morbid fear lest Ali became the caliph of the Muslims. Once it was reported to him that someone had said that after his (Umar's) death, he would acknowledge Ali as caliph. This greatly alarmed Umar, and he immediately warned the Muslims against doing so.

John Alden Williams

(Umar said) "I am about to say to you something which God has willed that I should say. He who understands and heeds it, let him take it with him whithersoever he goes. I have heard that someone said, 'If Umar were dead, I would hail so-and-so' (i.e. Ali - Editor)." (*Themes of Islamic Civilization, p. 61, 1971*)

Just before his death, Umar had summoned Abdur Rahman bin Auf to his chamber for a private meeting. It is not known what did they talk about because Umar is said to have exacted a pledge from

Abdur Rahman that he would keep the subject of the matters discussed a top secret which the latter did.

Calling upon President Nixon to resign from the presidency, following the Watergate investigations in Washington D.C., Senator James L. Buckley (Republican) of New York, said on March 19, 1974:

"The character of a regime always reflects and expresses the character of its leader, and the leader's aides and agents do what they sense and believe he wants them to do."

Umar's aides and agents did exactly what they "sensed" and believed he wanted them to do. Some years earlier, Uthman bin Affan had filled the position of private secretary to Abu Bakr. He was writing Abu Bakr's will and testament when the former was on his deathbed.

Abu Bakr had just begun to dictate, and Uthman had written only the words, "In the name of Allah, Most Merciful and Most Beneficent. I, Abu Bakr, successor of Muhammad, the Apostle of God ..." when he (Abu Bakr) lost consciousness. But before he regained consciousness, Uthman himself added the words: "... appoint Umar as my successor and your ruler," and thus completed the sentence.

Uthman "sensed" and knew exactly what Abu Bakr would have wished him to do. He went ahead and did it. His action won the approval of Abu Bakr when he recovered consciousness.

Abdur Rahman bin Auf "sensed" and knew exactly what Umar wished him to do, and he did it. Endowed with perception as he was, he could read all the signals in the policy lines of Umar!

Uthman bin Affan, the Third Khalifa of the Muslims, 644-656

Uthman bin Affan belonged to the clan of Umayya. He is said to have accepted Islam through the efforts of Abu Bakr, and was one of the early converts. He was one of the richest men in Makkah.

Uthman did not take part in the battle of Badr, and stayed in Medina.

Uthman was present in the battle of Uhud but ran away to save his life when the Muslims were defeated. Some of the fugitives returned to Medina but not Uthman. Shaikh Muhammad el-Khidhri Buck of Egypt writes in his book, *Noor al-Yaqeen fi Seeret Sayyed al-Mursaleen* (Cairo, p.138, 1953) that Uthman was extremely bashful and it was his bashfulness that prevented him from entering Medina.

During the negotiations of Hudaybiyya, the Prophet sent Uthman as his messenger to the Quraysh in Makkah. The reason he sent him, was that Umar had refused to go, and had pointed to him as a better envoy for the mission, knowing that he (Uthman) was Abu Sufyan's darling, and would, therefore, be safe from any harm. His selection had nothing to do with his fitness for the job.

Uthman is said to have taken a leading part to equip the expedition to Tabuk. In Medina, he is said to have bought a well and endowed it to the community.

During his caliphate, Uthman collected the verses of Qur'an, and published it as the official version of God's last message to mankind. There were other copies also extant but he seized them and burned them.

Uthman's forerunners in the government of Saqifa were Abu Bakr and Umar. Though Abu Bakr and Umar had not accomplished anything particularly remarkable in the lifetime of Muhammad, after his death they proved themselves to be men of extraordinary ability.

But Uthman, on the other hand, was a man of compelling mediocrity, both before and after he ascended the throne of his two predecessors. Apart from making some financial contribution to some community effort, he never did anything to distinguish him from the rank and file.

Uthman was already superannuated, being past 72, when he became khalifa. But in his case, superannuating was not a handicap. It was, in fact, one of his few assets. The electors were groaning under the iron discipline imposed upon them by Umar; he had curtailed many of their freedoms.

Now that he was dead, they had no intention of returning to those days of stress, and they wanted to enjoy their freedom. They, therefore, opted for a weak and aged khalifa whose grip on government, they knew, would always be loose.

Uthman's selection as khalifa, was an inevitable reaction against the excessive rigors of the times of Umar.

Uthman narrated 146 traditions of the Prophet of Islam.

Uthman's Marriages

At one time there were three girls living in the household of Khadija. Their names were Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom. Zainab, the eldest of the three, was married to one Abul-'As ibn er-Rabi' of Makkah. This man fought against the Prophet in the battle of Badr, and was captured by the Muslims.

To ransom his freedom, his wife sent to the Prophet, a necklace which at one time had belonged to Khadija, and she had given it to her as a present on her marriage. Abul-'As was set free; he returned to Makkah, and sent Zainab to Medina as he had promised to do. Zainab, however, died soon after her arrival in Medina. Later, Abul-'As also went to Medina, accepted Islam, and lived with the Muslims.

The other two girls, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom, were married to Utba and Utaiba, the sons of Abu Lahab and Umm Jameel. Umm Jameel was the sister of Abu Sufyan, the chief of the clan of Umayya. Abu Sufyan, therefore, was the maternal uncle of Utba and Utaiba.

It is not known with any degree of certainty who were these three girls. Most of the Sunni historians claim that they were the daughters of Muhammad and Khadija. According to some other historians, they

were the daughters of Khadija by an earlier marriage.

The Shia Muslims disagree. They assert that Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom were not the daughters of Muhammad and Khadija; in fact, they were not even the daughters of Khadija by any earlier marriage; they were the daughters of a (widowed) sister of Khadija. Khadija's sister also died, and upon her death, she brought the three girls into her own house and brought them up as her own children.

According to the Shia Muslims, Muhammad and Khadija had three and not six children.The first two of them – Qasim and Tayyeb or Tahir – were boys, and both of them died in their infancy. Their third and the last child was a girl – Fatima Zahra. She was their only child who did not die in infancy.

The girls – Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom – could not have been the daughters of the Prophet of Islam. If they were, he would not have given them in marriage to the idolaters which the husbands of all three of them were. It's true that all three girls were married long before the dawn of Islam. But then he did not violate any of the imperatives of Qur'an at any time – before or after he was ordained God's Messenger. And Qur'an is explicit on the prohibition of the marriage of a Muslim woman to a pagan.

The proscription of the marriage of a Muslim woman and a polytheist occurs in the following verses of Qur'an:

Do not marry (your girls) to unbelievers. (***Chapter 2; verse 221***)

They (believing women) are not lawful (wives) for the unbelievers, nor are the (unbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them. (***Chapter 60; verse 10***)

There are other verses in Qur'an which, without referring specifically to marriage, make it impossible for a Muslim to give his daughter or daughters to an idolater. Some of them are:

…the curse of God is on those without faith. (***Chapter 2; verse 89***)

…God is an enemy to those who reject faith. (***Chapter 2, verse 98***)

O ye who believe! Truly the pagans are unclean. (***Chapter 9:verse 28***)

Can a Muslim, even if he is a "marginal" or a "statistical" Muslim, believe that Muhammad, the Bringer and the Interpreter of Qur'an, would give his daughters to those men whom God has cursed; whose enemy He is; and who are unclean?

To a believer, the verses of Qur'an quoted above, are incontrovertible proof that Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom, all three married, at one time, to three idolaters in Makkah, were not the daughters of Muhammad Mustafa and Khadija.

It should also be noted that the Apostle who was very fond of children, never said anything about Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom. The parents give the same love to all their children, and do not

make any distinction between them. But he was bestowing encomiums only upon his daughter, Fatima Zahra. Judging by the traditions, he was not even aware that three women called Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom existed.

Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom were still living with their husbands when a new revelation, the Chapter 111 of Qur'an, came from Heaven. In this chapter Abu Lahab and his wife, Umm Jameel, the in-laws of Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom, were cursed for their perversity.

The new revelation roused the anger of the old couple, and they ordered their sons to divorce their wives, and to send them back to Khadija's home. The boys obeyed their parents, divorced their wives and they (the wives) returned to Khadija's home. Sometime later, Ruqayya was married to Uthman bin Affan. She died in A.D. 624. After her death, her sister, Umm Kulthoom, was also married to Uthman. She died a few years later.

The years in Makkah, after the proclamation of Islam, and the early years in Medina, were fraught with peril for Muhammad. Everyday brought new challenges to him. He put his life in the line of fire as soon as he stepped out of his house. And yet, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom are never mentioned as giving any service to their father.

On the other hand, Fatima Zahra helped her father in various emergencies, both in Makkah and Medina. Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom both were many years older than Fatima, and they ought to have cheered and comforted their father whenever he was oppressed by the idolaters in Makkah or was wounded in battles in Medina but they never did.

The Sunni historians have bestowed upon Uthman the grandiloquent title of *Dhun-Noorayn* which means "the owner of two lights," because he married, according to them, two daughters of the Prophet, an honor not attained even by Abu Bakr and Umar!

Uthman became the owner of two lights after marrying Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom. But both of these girls were married to two idolaters, i.e., Utba and Utaiba, the sons of Abu Lahab, before they were married to Uthman. Therefore, each of the two sons of Abu Lahab ought to be called *Dhun-Noor* – the owner of one light. Each of them, Utba and Utaiba, was the owner of one light which he passed on to Uthman, thus making him the owner of two lights. After all, the lights remained the same; only the ownership changed!

Principal Events of the Caliphate of Uthman

In A.D. 645, there were rebellions in the provinces of Azerbaijan and Armenia, and they were quelled.

In 647, Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan, Uthman's governor in Syria, invaded Asia Minor and captured Ammuria.

In 648, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, Uthman's governor in Egypt, captured Tripoli in Libya.

Both Muawiya and Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh built fleets and challenged the naval power of the Byzantine in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In 649, Muawiya's fleet conquered Cyprus.

In 651, Uthman's generals conquered Herat in Afghanistan.

In 652, the first official copy of Al-Qur'an al-Majid was published in Medina, and its copies were distributed in all provinces.

In 652-54, Abdullah bin Aamir, Uthman's governor in Basra, sent his general, Abdur Rahman bin Samra, to the east, where he conquered Balkh in Khurasan, and Kabul and Ghazni in Afghanistan. These new conquests made the empire of the Muslims contiguous with the sub-continent of Indo-Pakistan.

Favoritism and Nepotism in the Khilafat of Uthman

Uthman loved the members of his own clan, the Banu Umayya, to a point where his love became an obsession. The Umayyads were the arch-enemies of Islam, and they had fought against its Prophet for more than two decades. Now suddenly, Uthman made them masters of the empire of the Muslims. He himself became their puppet, and they took the reins of the government in their own hands. The real rulers of the empire, in the khilafat of Uthman, were Marwan (the cousin and son-in-law of Uthman) and Hakam bin Abul-Aas (Uthman's uncle and Marwan's father).

Uthman opened the gates of the public treasury to his relatives. He gave them rich presents, vast estates and high ranks. Then, as if he had not done enough for them, he forbade the citizens of Medina to graze their camels and cattle in the pastures around the city. These pastures had been made a public endowment by the Prophet but according to the new ordinance of Uthman, only those animals could graze in them which belonged either to himself or to the Banu Umayya.

The Prophet had told the Muslims that all those lands which were irrigated by rain, were the property of the whole *umma*, and therefore, the animals of all its members could graze in them. He had also told them that these lands could not be appropriated by anyone for private use as was done in the Times of Ignorance.

Al-Qur'an al-Majid has told the story of Prophet Saleh in its seventh chapter (Al-'Araf - the Heights). According to this story, the haughty and the mighty of the times of the Prophet, Saleh, prevented the access of the humble and the weak people and their cattle, to the springs. It was only through the intervention of Saleh that the latter could obtain water from the springs.

Like water, pasture was also considered to be a free gift of God to His creatures but the arrogant ones

denied it to them. What was done in the times of Saleh by the rich and the powerful of the Thamud, was now being done in Medina by the rich and the powerful of that city – the Umayyads. They formed the new clique, grasping all the levers of power.

The government in Medina had become an inter-locking directorate of the cousins, the in-laws and the other relatives of Uthman. Other Muslims had no share in it. Principal figures in the "directorate" were:

Hakam bin Abul Aas

Hakam was Uthman's uncle. In Makkah, he was one of the neighbors of Muhammad, and was one of his tormentors. He made a mockery of the Word of God, and ridiculed His Messenger.

In 630 the Apostle captured Makkah whereupon Hakam, his son Marwan and many other Umayyads "accepted" Islam. But Hakam and his son could never overcome their animosity to Islam and its Prophet. If they could hurt Islam, they did.

Eventually, the Prophet banished them from Medina. When he died, and Abu Bakr became khalifa, Uthman requested him to allow his uncle and his son-in-law to return to Medina but he refused. When Umar became khalifa, Uthman begged him to let the two pariahs come back to Medina but he too refused. Then Uthman became khalifa, and he, of course, lost no time in bringing them back to Medina, and in bestowing the greatest honors upon them.

Yaqoobi, the historian, says that when Hakam entered Medina, he was wearing dirty tatters like a beggar but when he left Uthman's palace, he was dressed in the richest silks and brocade.

Uthman appointed Hakam as collector of the poor-tax from the tribe of Banu Qaza'a. Baladhuri, the historian, says that Hakam collected 300,000 dirhems and when he brought it to the khalifa, the latter gave it back to him to keep and to spend.

Yaqoobi has quoted a certain Abdur Rahman ibn Yasir in his history as follows:

An officer's duty was to collect taxes from the merchants of the markets in Medina. One evening I noticed that Uthman, the khalifa, came to him, and asked him to pay to Hakam all the money which he had collected that day. It was Uthman's practice to bestow gifts from the public treasury to members of his family.

The tax collector tried to fob off Uthman and said that he would pay when he had collected all the dues. But Uthman said to him: "You are my treasurer, and do what I tell you to do." The collector retorted that he was the treasurer neither of Uthman nor of his relatives but only of the Muslims. On the following morning, the same officer came into the Mosque, and addressing the congregation, said: "O Muslims! Uthman says that I am his treasurer. I am not. I am the treasurer of the Muslims. I do not want to be his treasurer." He then threw the keys of the treasury before Uthman, and walked out. Uthman picked up

the keys, and gave them to Zayd bin Thabit.

Marwan bin al-Hakam

Marwan was Hakam's son and Uthman's first cousin. He was married to Uthman's daughter, Umm Aban.

Marwan was Uthman's “prime minister.” He distributed gifts from the public treasury to whomsoever he pleased, and he distributed positions of authority in the government to his favorites. He also kept the privy seal of the khalifa in his possession and made free use and abuse of it. Uthman was in his grip, and acted upon his advice blindly.

After a successful campaign in Africa, one of Uthman's generals sent the spoils of war to him in Medina. This was estimated to be a half-million pieces of gold. Uthman gave all of it to Marwan.

Baladhuri, the historian, has quoted Abdullah bin Zubayr as follows:

“In 27 Hijri, Uthman sent us to the front in Africa. His foster brother, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, was the general of the army. He captured vast quantities of booty; kept four-fifths of it for the army, and sent one-fifth to Uthman in Medina. Uthman gave it all to Marwan.”

On another occasion, Uthman gave his son-in-law four million dirhems out of the public treasury. He also made the estate of Fadak a gift to him.

Marwan was to reveal himself one of the most rapacious grafters in the khilafat of Uthman, and manifested a vampire-like mentality of extortion.

Harith bin al-Hakam

Harith, the younger brother of Marwan, was married to the second daughter of Uthman. He received a gift of 300,000 dirhems from the treasury. Baladhuri says that once some camels were sent to the khalifa as part of the poor-tax, and he gave them to Harith.

Abdullah bin Khalid

Abdullah bin Khalid was another of Uthman's sons-in-law. When he gave him his daughter, he ordered Abdullah bin Aamir, his governor in Basra, to pay him (Abdullah bin Khalid) 600,000 dirhems from the public treasury.

Walid bin Aqaba

Walid was the son of Aqaba bin Abi Mu'ait. Aqaba was the first or second husband of the mother of Uthman. In Makkah, he was also a neighbor of Muhammad, and like Umm Jameel, he too collected

garbage and threw it at his door. He fought against the Prophet at Badr, was captured, and upon his orders, was executed.

Walid and his brothers – the siblings of Uthman – accepted Islam when Makkah was conquered.

On one occasion, the Prophet sent Walid to the tribe of Banu Mustalaq to collect taxes. He left Medina but soon came back and told the Prophet that the Banu Mustalaq had repudiated Islam, and had refused to pay their taxes.

The Prophet was surprised to hear this. But before he could investigate the matter, the leaders of Banu Mustalaq themselves arrived in Medina to pay their taxes. They assured the Prophet that they were sincere Muslims. Walid had never visited them.

It was after this incident that the following verse was revealed to the Messenger of God:

O ye who believe! If a fasiq (***wicked person***) ***comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done.*** (***Chapter 49; verse 6***)

It was the Book of God which called Walid a *fasiq,* and it was by this name that he was known ever–after.

Umar bin al–Khattab had told Uthman that if he became khalifa, he should appoint Saad bin Abi Waqqas the governor of Kufa. Uthman became khalifa, and he appointed Saad governor of Kufa as per Umar's wish. But within a year, Uthman dismissed Saad and appointed Walid in his place as the new governor.

As soon as Walid found himself in control of the rich province, he became drunk, both with power and with wine. He was a compulsive drinker. He was drunk even when he led the Muslims in prayer. One morning he entered the mosque in a state of drunkenness. He led the prayer, and then vomited in the alcove of the mosque. The reports on his drunkenness became so persistent that even Uthman was unable to turn a blind eye on them, and he was compelled to recall him to Medina. In his stead, Uthman appointed Saeed bin Aas as the new governor of Kufa.

Saeed bin Aas

Saeed's father, a rabid enemy of the Apostle of God, was killed in the battle of Badr. After his death, Uthman adopted his son, and brought him up in his own home. In 30 Hijri Uthman dismissed Walid and appointed Saeed the new governor of Kufa. He also gave him a present of 100,000 dirhems from the state treasury.

Like other members of his clan, Saeed also considered public funds as his private wealth, and spent them as he pleased. If anyone protested, he silenced him with his “police” powers. He could get any

man beaten up and he could get anyone's house burned down.

The governors were plundering every province in the empire. They seemed to have the tacit blessing if not the explicit encouragement of the khalifa. Inevitably, agitation began to simmer and smolder. Uthman was told that someday there would be an explosion. Alarmed by the growing discontent and the crescendo of protests, he convened a conference of all his governors.

They came, gave him some perfunctory advice, and dispersed. Saeed bin Aas was also among them. But after the conference when he returned to Kufa, the citizens of that city stopped him near Qadsiyya, and told him that they would not let him enter Kufa. He could not enter Kufa, and went back to Medina. In his place, Uthman appointed Abu Musa al-Ashari as the new governor.

Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh

This Abdullah was the foster-brother of Uthman. His father, Saad bin Abi Sarh, was one of the *munafiqeen* in Medina.

Abdullah, at one time, was one of the secretaries of the Prophet. When the latter dictated to him any verse of Qur'an, he distorted it by changing its diacritical marks or the letters or the words. Soon he was caught and the Prophet banished him from Medina. He repudiated Islam, went to Makkah, and began to spread the story that Muhammad himself made up the verses of Qur'an, and claimed that they are revelations from Heaven.

When Makkah was conquered, the Prophet ordered that Abdullah should be executed as an apostate even if he was in the Kaaba itself. But Uthman managed to conceal him in his own house. Later, when conditions became normal, he brought him before the Prophet and said that he sought pardon and also wished to take the oath of loyalty. But the Prophet did not put out his hand, and maintained a studied silence for a considerable time. Uthman importuned him to pardon Abdullah.

Eventually, he pardoned him. But as soon as Uthman and Abdullah were out of his sight, he turned to those around him, and said: "I was silent for such a long time hoping that one of you would kill him." Baladhuri writes in his book, *Ansab-ul-Ashraf* (p. 358):

"The Apostle said: 'Was there no one among you who would kill this dog before he got a pardon?'

Umar bin al-Khattab answered: 'O Messenger of God, if you had signaled to us, we would have killed him.' The Apostle said: 'I could not signal to you. Doing so would be unworthy of me.'"

When Uthman became khalifa, he appointed Abdullah the governor of Egypt. With his appointment, a reign of tyranny and exploitation began in Egypt. The fortunes of Egypt turned into misfortunes; prosperity turned into adversity. Everyone turned against the new governor. The latter also ran afoul of Muhammad ibn Hudhaifa.

Muhammad's father, Hudhaifa, was one of the earliest converts to Islam. He died fighting in the battle of Yarmok. At his death, Uthman took charge of Muhammad, his young son, and brought him up. When he grew up, he sought permission to go to the foreign wars. Uthman allowed him to accompany Abdullah bin Saad to Egypt as one of his aides.

Muhammad bin Hudhaifa was a very pious and God-fearing man, and spent most of his time in devotions. When graft and corruption reared their head in the administration, he admonished Abdullah, and urged him to restore good government. But Abdullah did not respond to sincere admonition.

Nevertheless, Muhammad persisted in his efforts to reform him. Abdullah, however, appeared to have, like Marwan, a streak of perversity in his character, and took pleasure in doing just what he was forbidden to do.

Eventually, Muhammad gave up hope. From a friendly and sympathetic admonisher, he turned into a disillusioned and a bitter critic – first of Abdullah bin Saad, and later of Uthman himself for appointing as governor of Egypt an apostate whose execution had been ordered by the Apostle of God himself.

The people of Egypt loved Muhammad ibn Hudhaifa for his uprightness and his courage in criticizing the errant governor, and they rallied round him. Abdullah wrote to Uthman that the young man he (Uthman) had brought up, was spreading sedition against the government, and that if nothing was done to stop him, the situation would get out of hand.

Uthman did not know what to do. It occurred to him that he might silence Muhammad's protests with gold and silver. He, therefore, sent to him 30,000 dirhems and many expensive pieces of fabrics as a present. This gambit, unfortunately for Uthman, backfired upon him. Muhammad brought the money and the material into the great mosque, piled them on the ground before the Muslims, and said:

"O Muslims! Do you see what Uthman is trying to do? He is trying to buy my Faith. He has sent these coins and these goods to me as a bribe." (*Tarikh Kamil: Kamil ibn Atheer, Vol.3, p.135*)

Uthman wrote many placatory letters to Muhammad, and reminded him that he was under a debt of gratitude to him. But Muhammad ignored them, and the agitation against Abdullah bin Saad went on gathering momentum.

The leaders of the Egyptian Muslims held a meeting at which they decided to send a delegation to Medina to demand from Uthman the dismissal of Abdullah bin Saad.

After the departure of the Egyptian delegation, the position of Abdullah became rather untenable. Fearful of revolution, he too left Egypt for Medina, partly, to defend himself at the court of the khalifa. In his absence, Muhammad ibn Hudhaifa took charge of the government.

When Abdullah reached Elath, he heard that Uthman's palace was under siege, and that he was confined to it. He figured that it would not be safe for him to go to Medina, and he decided to return to

Egypt. But at the border, he was informed that Muhammad ibn Hudhaifa had given orders to stop him, and not to let him reenter Egypt.

Thereupon, he went to Palestine awaiting the outcome of events in Medina. In the meantime, Uthman was killed in Medina, and when Abdullah heard the news, he left Palestine, and went to Damascus to live under the protection of Muawiya.

New Governors of the Provinces

Kufa

During the first year of Uthman's caliphate, Saad bin Abi Waqqas was the governor of Kufa. Then Uthman dismissed him, and appointed his own half-brother, Walid bin Aqaba, as the new governor of Kufa.

Basra

Umar had appointed Abu Musa al-Ashari as the governor of Basra. Uthman dismissed him, and appointed his own cousin, Abdullah bin Aamir, as the new governor.

Syria

Umar had appointed Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan as his governor of Syria. Uthman confirmed him as his governor in that province.

Egypt

Amr bin Aas had conquered Egypt, and Umar had appointed him its governor. Uthman dismissed him, and in his stead, he appointed his own foster-brother, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh. This man was an apostate, and the Prophet had ordered his execution but had suspended the sentence when Uthman pleaded for him. Thus Uthman first saved the life of an apostate and then made him a governor over the Muslims.

Modern Historians and the Caliphate of Uthman

Following is the report of some of the modern historians on graft, corruption, nepotism and abuse of power in the time of Uthman, the third khalifa of the Muslims.

E. A. Belyaev

The undisguised plunder of the Moslem treasury met with protests from those few companions of the Prophet who deemed that all receipts belonged to the Moslems and should be divided equally between

them. The most outstanding of these opponents of inequality of wealth was Abu-Dharr al-Ghiffari.

In the period of conquest, this old 'companion' whom, according to tradition, Mohammed set as an example to other Moslems, had gone to Syria where he publicly decried the viceroy and the war leaders for appropriating booty and tribute which in his opinion was 'the property of Allah,' belonging to all Moslems (p. 143).

Moawiya asked the Caliph Uthman to remove this dangerous agitator, who was becoming increasingly popular among the rank-and-file, from Syria. Recalled by Uthman, Abu-Dharr settled in Medina, but, on learning there that the caliph had given generous gifts out of the Moslem treasury to his nephew (sic) and son-in-law, Marwan ibn al-Hakam, while granting 300,000 dirhems from the same source to another nephew, Harith ibn al-Hakam, and 100,000 dirhems to one Zaid ibn Thabit, he began to criticize him sharply, promising *all four,* on the strength of Qur'an, punishment in the flames of Hell.

Pursuing his criticism, this irreconcilable and incorruptible tribune (Abu-Dharr) declared that rich men increase their riches by despoiling the poor. The caliph ordered the "trouble-maker" deported to an out-of-the-way place, where he died in extreme poverty, leaving his widow without even the means to pay for his modest burial.

During the rule of Uthman, his relatives, members of the Meccan slave-holding aristocracy, seized governmental posts and landed estates in the conquered countries. Historical tradition assigns a particularly pernicious role to the caliph's nephew and son-in-law, Marwan, who, profiting from his father-in-law's senility, took over the actual power of government in Medina and connived in every way with the arbitrary deeds of his avid, plundering relatives. These kin of the caliph, members of the Umayya clan, had been appointed by Uthman as viceroys and war leaders; they appropriated those lands considered the property of the Moslem community.

Such seizures of land, together with the spoliation, blackmail and violence committed by these rulers, gave rise to a growing discontent, expressed most forcefully by those friends of Omar who had been displaced from their influential and lucrative positions. Their displeasure was shared by Arab tribes (especially in Irak) whose material interests suffered from the arbitrary dissipation of state funds at the hands of Uthman's appointees.

The Caliph Uthman himself set the example of misuse of governmental receipts for the benefit of his own family; when his daughter was married to Abdullah ibn Khalid, for instance, Uthman granted them 600,000 dirhems out of the Basra bait-ul-mal, while when Abdullah ibn Sarh sent 3000 qanatir of gold from Ifriqiya, he ordered this gold to be given to the family of al-Hakam (p. 144). (*Arabs, Islam* & *the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages, New York, 1969*)

Sir John Glubb

In 646 Osman appointed his half-brother, Waleed ibn Uqba, governor of Kufa. His father, Uqba, had

been taken prisoner at Bedr fighting for Quraish and had been condemned to death by the Prophet himself. To his anguished cry, “Who will take care of my little children?” Mohammed had replied coldly, “hell fire.”

The new governor of Kufa was one of those little children whom the Apostle of God himself consigned to the infernal regions. Waleed also had a reputation for insobriety. Criticism of Osman's appointments was growing in volume. His foster brother, Ibn Abi Sarh, had been made governor of Egypt, though the Prophet had pronounced him worthy of death for apostasy... (pp. 290–291)

In the Islamic theocracy the state was not an impersonal organization but (in theory at least) the chosen instrument of God. No sophistry could justify a man preferring the material interests of his relatives to the service of God Himself.

The manifest impiety of many of Osman's nominees, and the fact that they or their fathers had been the bitterest opponents of the Prophet, offended the many sincerely religious Muslims in Mecca and Medina. The companions were still fairly numerous, not to mention the men who had fought at Bedr and Uhud, or who had sworn the oath of the Tree between the hands of the Apostle of God at Hudaybiyya. All these now saw the theocracy of Islam ruled by the Prophet's enemies, who likewise enjoyed those earthly rewards which were the proper guerdon of the faithful believers. (p. 297).

An example of what the strict Muslims felt about the age of Osman is provided by the case of Abu Dharr. This man had been an early convert and had lived out his life as a genuine ascetic. He now, first in Damascus and then in Medina, began to preach sermons denouncing the demoralization of the times.

In Syria, in Iraq, and even in Medina, the leading Muslims lived in marble palaces, surrounded by slaves and concubines, clad in luxurious clothing and indulging in sumptuous food. There can be no doubt that Abu Dharr was right in his charge that all this wealth and luxury was undermining the former hardy and frugal Arab virtues. But the rulers of the empire alleged that his words were inciting the people to revolt, and Osman decreed his banishment to a lonely oasis in Central Arabia. There two years later, he died in want, and his memory was soon venerated as that of a saint. (*The Great Arab Conquests, London, 1963*)

Uthman and the Friends of Muhammad, the Messenger of God

If Uthman could not lavish enough love upon such enemies of Muhammad Mustafa and Islam as Hakam, Marwan, Walid and Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, he also could not expend enough animosity upon such true believers, lovers of God, and sincere friends of Muhammad Mustafa, as Abu Dharr el–Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood. Their story will make this point clear.

Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari

It was reported to Uthman that Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari had spoken before the Muslims in the Mosque as follows:

“I am Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, companion of Muhammad, the Last Messenger of God. Allah has elevated Adam, Noah and the children of Abraham and Imran over and above the rest of mankind. Muhammad has inherited the legacy of all these prophets. He combines in his person all their qualities, attributes and achievements. A

nd Muhammad's successor is Ali ibn Abi Talib. O ye Muslims, who are bewildered today, if after the death of your Prophet, you had put him (Ali) ahead of others, as Allah put him ahead of others, and if you had put those men behind whom Allah has put behind, and if you had left authority and power at its source, i.e., in the house of your Prophet, then you would have received the blessings of Allah.

There would not have been any one poor or destitute. Nor any two men would have disagreed on the interpretation of the Message of Allah, and everyone would have carried out his duties toward Him, and toward the other members of the community, as was done in the times of His Messenger himself. You would have found guidance and enlightenment at its fountainhead, i.e., in the house of Muhammad. But you allowed the authority and the power of the house of your Prophet to be usurped, and now you are paying the penalty.”

The informers also told Uthman that Abu Dharr was drawing attention of the Muslims to his (Uthman's) deviations from the practices of the Prophet as well as from the practices of Abu Bakr and Umar.

Uthman ordered Abu Dharr to leave Medina, and to go to Syria and to live there.

In Syria, Muawiya had consolidated his position, and he had cultivated a secular instead of an Islamic lifestyle. Abu Dharr witnessed many foul and unIslamic practices at the court of Syria. He noticed that the gold and silver of the province was being squandered in Damascus on the luxuries of the nobles while there were many Muslims who were starving. Muawiya soon learned that Abu Dharr was no less irrepressible in Damascus than he was in Medina. Abu Dharr recited those verses of Qur’an in which the hoarders of wealth are denounced. He was blunt in his criticism and spoke the truth regardless of cost to himself. Muawiya had built a palace for himself. Abu Dharr said to him:

“If you built this palace out of the funds which belong to the Muslims, then you have betrayed a trust; and if you built it from your personal wealth, then you have been guilty of extravagance and vanity.”

Abu Dharr told Muawiya and the Syrian nobles that they would be branded in hell with the gold and the silver which they were hoarding.

At last Muawiya's patience reached the breaking point, and he wrote to Uthman:

“I fear that Abu Dharr may incite the people to rebellion. If you do not want rebellion in the country, then you should recall him to Medina immediately.”

Uthman agreed. Muawiya mounted Abu Dharr on a camel without a howdah, and he ordered the camel-driver to travel non-stop to Medina. Abu Dharr arrived in Medina half-dead with wounds, exhaustion and exposure.

But even in this state, Abu Dharr could not acquiesce in falsehood, injustice, exploitation and disobedience to the commandments of God. The love of truth and justice burned in his heart like a flame. If any case of embezzlement came to his attention, he denounced it, and castigated its authors publicly. At last Uthman could take it no more. He summoned Abu Dharr to his court and the following exchange took place between them:

Uthman: I will banish you from Medina.

Abu Dharr: Will you banish me from the city of the Prophet?

Uthman: Yes.

Abu Dharr: Will you send me to Kufa?

Uthman: No.

Abu Dharr: Will you send me to Basra?

Uthman: No.

Abu Dharr: Where else can you send me then?

Uthman: Which is the place that you dislike most?

Abu Dharr: Rabza.

Uthman: That's where I will send you.

Uthman kept his word, and banished Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari to Rabza. He also issued orders that no one should talk with him or walk with him. But Ali came to see him, and to talk and walk with him. With Ali were his own sons, the sons of Aqeel ibn Abi Talib, and his nephew, Abdullah ibn Jafar.

It was a heart-breaking scene. Ali was parting company with his bosom friend, and the friend and beloved of Muhammad Mustafa. His own heart was full of sadness, but he tried to comfort his friend with the following words:

“O Abu Dharr, you were angry with these people because they deviated from the course charted by Allah. Therefore Allah Himself will recompense you. They are afraid of you because they think you might

deprive them of their gold and silver. But if you were also like them, they would have become your friends."

Then Husain, the younger grandson of Muhammad Mustafa, turned his misty eyes toward the beloved of his grandfather, now going into exile, and said:

"O my uncle, Allah will change even a time like this. Your enemies have 'saved' their worldly interests from you but you have saved your Hereafter from them. What they have saved is utterly worthless but what you have saved, is something that will last forever."

Ali and his companions walked in silence with Abu Dharr, and when time came to part, the latter said:

"O poeple of the House of Muhammad! May Allah bless you. Whenever I see you, recollection comes to me of my friend and beloved, Muhammad, the Apostle and beloved of Allah."

Abu Dharr, his wife and his slave, were banished to Rabza in the desert, and sometime later, he died there. His wife and slave covered his face, turned it toward the Kaaba, and sat by the roadside not knowing what to do. Presently, they saw some riders coming from the direction of Iraq. These riders were Abdullah ibn Masood, an old friend of Muhammad, and some other travelers. They were going to Medina. When they saw Abu Dharr's widow, they halted and asked her who she was and what she was doing in that desolate place.

Abu Dharr's slave told them who they were, and informed them that the body of Abu Dharr was lying unburied as the ground was rocky and they were unable to dig a grave.

Abdullah ibn Masood burst into tears and lamented the death of his own friend, and the friend of the Apostle of God.

Abdullah ibn Masood and his companions dug a grave, arranged a simple funeral, said prayers, and buried Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Burayda b. Sufyan al-Aslami from Muhammad b. Kaaba al-Qurazi from Abdullah b. Masood told me that when Uthman exiled Abu Dharr to Rabza, and his appointed time came, there was no one with him except his wife and a slave. He instructed them to wash his body and to drape it in a shroud, and lay him on the surface of the road, and tell the first caravan that passed who he was, and ask them to help in burying him.

When he died, they did this. Abdullah b. Masood arrived with some other men from Iraq on pilgrimage when they saw the bier on the roadside. The slave rose and said, "This is Abu Dharr, the Apostle's friend. Help us to bury him." Abdullah b. Masood broke out into loud weeping, and said: "The Apostle was right; you walked alone, and you died alone, and you will be raised alone." Then he and his

companions dismounted from their camels and buried him, and he told them his story and what the Apostle had said on the road to Tabuk. (*The Life of Muhammad*)

Dr. Taha Husain

"Abu Dharr was one of the earliest converts to Islam, and he was one of those who were loved and admired by the Prophet himself. The Prophet used to say: "The blue sky never held its canopy over a man who was more truthful than Abu Dharr."

Abu Dharr learned that Uthman gave a lot of money to Marwan bin al-Hakam; and he gave to his brother, Harith bin al-Hakam 300,000 dirhems; and he gave to Zayd bin Thabit Ansari 100,000 dirhems. Abu Dharr criticized all this, and he told the hoarders how they would be burned in hell. He read the verse of Quran: *Give tidings of torture to those who hoard gold and silver and do not spend their wealth for the sake of Allah* (*9:34*).

Marwan bin al-Hakam informed Uthman what Abu Dharr was reading. Uthman sent his slave to Abu Dharr and forbade him to read the Qur'anic verse in question. Abu Dharr said: "Does Uthman forbid me to read the Book of Allah, and to forget His commandments? If I have to choose between the pleasure of Allah and the pleasure of Uthman, I shall certainly choose the pleasure of Allah."

Abu Dharr was persistent in his criticism of the hoarders of wealth, and he called upon the Muslims not to be spendthrifts." (*al- Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published in Cairo in 1959 p. 163*)

Abu Dharr struggled against the merchandising school of politics. In Islam, his voice was the first one that rose in protest against religious and political totalitarianism, and economic exploitation, and his was also the first voice to rise in defense of the Muslim "under-dog." His voice was stifled but his ideals could not be stifled. He lifted his ideals out of Al-Qur'an al-Majid. Any attempt to stifle his ideals is an attempt to stifle Al-Qur'an al-Majid.

Abu Dharr's voice was the voice of the Conscience of Islam, and his platform was the Rights of Man. May God bless him to all eternity.

Ammar ibn Yasir

Ammar ibn Yasser was also one of the earliest converts to Islam. As noted before, his mother and father were tortured to death by the pagans in Makkah. They were the first and the second martyrs of Islam, and this is a distinction that no one in all Islam can share with them. Like Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar was also one of the few favorites of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, who once said:

"Ammar is the embodiment of all Iman (Faith)"

Just like Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari and a few others, Ammar also was not very popular with the brokers of

economic and political power of his time, and a head-on collision between him and them was inevitable.

Dr. Taha Husain

"Ammar migrated first to Abyssinia, and then to Medina. He was the first Muslim to build a Mosque. He built it in Makkah itself, and he prayed in it. And he built, with others, the Mosque of the Prophet (in Medina). While other Muslims carried one brick at a time, he carried two. He also dug, with others, the trench at the siege of Medina. He was covered with dust. The Apostle of God himself removed dust from his head and face.

When Ammar heard the news of the death of Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, he mourned for him. Uthman interpreted his lamentations (for Abu Dharr) as a reproach to himself. He was highly incensed, and ordered him also to leave Medina, and to go to Rabza (in exile).

When Ammar got ready to leave Medina, the Banu Makhzoom whose client he was, were infuriated. Ali was also displeased. He went to see Uthman, reproved him for banishing Abu Dharr, and told him not to do the same to Ammar. Uthman said to him: "You are no better than Ammar, and you too deserve to be banished from Medina." Ali answered: "Go ahead, and do that." Then the other Muhajireen intervened and told Uthman that he could not banish everyone with whom he happened to be displeased.

On one occasion, Uthman had taken a piece of jewelry from the treasury for his own family. Among those men who raised objection to this act, was Ammar ibn Yasir. Uthman was beside himself with rage. "How do you dare to question me?" he roared. He then ordered his slaves to seize him. They seized him, and Uthman beat him up brutally until he lost consciousness. He was taken from the mosque in that state to the house of Umm Salma, the widow of the Prophet. Ammar was unconscious the rest of the day.

When he regained consciousness at last, he rose, took ablutions, offered his prayers, and said: "Thank Allah, it's not the first time that I have been tortured for speaking the truth." (the first time when Ammar was tortured for upholding the truth of Islam, he was in Makkah. In those days, it was Abu Jahl who tortured him).

On another occasion, some companions of the Prophet drafted a letter of advice to Uthman, and they requested Ammar to present it to him. When Ammar presented the letter to Uthman, he again lost his temper. Once again, he ordered his slaves to knock him down. They knocked him down, and Uthman kicked him in his groin, and beat him up until he fainted." (*al- Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published in Cairo in 1959*)

Abdullah ibn Masood

Abdullah ibn Masood was one of the principal companions of the Prophet. As noted before, he was the first man who read Qur'an in Kaaba in the presence of the leaders of the Quraysh, and was beaten up

by them for doing so. He was one of the most knowledgeable men in Medina. He spent much time in the company of the Prophet, and had more familiarity with his practices and precedents than most of the other companions. It was for this reason that Umar had asked him to be with him at all times. There were many occasions when Umar did not know how the Prophet had solved a problem or had taken a decision in some matter. On such occasions, he consulted Abdullah ibn Masood, and acted upon his advice. In his later years, Umar had appointed him treasurer of Kufa.

Dr. Taha Husain

Abdullah ibn Masood was the treasurer of Kufa when Saad bin Abi Waqqas was its governor. Uthman dismissed Saad, and made Walid bin Aqaba the new governor. Walid took a loan from the treasury. When the stipulated time had passed, and the loan was not returned, Ibn Masood asked him to pay it. He informed Uthman about it. Uthman wrote to him: "You are my treasurer. Do not demand the loan from Walid." Ibn Masood resented this. He threw away the keys of the treasury, and stayed at home.

From that time, Abdullah ibn Masood became a critic of Uthman's fiscal and political policies. Walid wrote to Uthman about him, and the latter asked him (Walid) to send him (Ibn Masood) to Medina.

Ibn Masood arrived in Medina, and went into the Mosque. When he entered the Mosque, Uthman was reading the sermon. When Uthman saw him entering the Mosque, he said: "A foul and despicable beast is coming toward you." Ibn Masood said: "That is not so. I am the companion and friend of the Apostle of God. I fought at Badr, and I am a Companion of the Tree." Ayesha also heard in her chamber what Uthman had said, and she cried out: "Is this the kind of language you use for a companion of the Apostle of God?"

Uthman ordered Abdullah ibn Masood to get out of the Mosque of the Prophet. Uthman's slaves threw him out of the Mosque, and down on the ground breaking his ribs.

Ali rose to upbraid Uthman, and said: "You have hurt a friend of the Apostle merely at a report from Walid. You know that Walid is a liar." He then carried Ibn Masood to his home.

But Uthman was not satisfied with what he had done. After breaking the ribs of Abdullah ibn Masood, he stopped payment of his pension, and forbade him to leave Medina. Ibn Masood wished to go to Syria and to take part in the campaigns but Uthman repeated what he had heard Marwan saying: "He has created enough trouble in Kufa; do not let him do the same in Syria." (p. 160) (*al- Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published in Cairo in 1959*)

As noted before, Abdullah ibn Masood had made his own collection of the verses of Qur'an, and he had arranged them in chronological order. But Uthman had appointed his favorite, Zayd bin Thabit, to collect and to arrange the verses of Qur'an. He did not "recognize" the collection of Ibn Masood, and ordered him to surrender his copy. Abdullah ibn Masood refused to do so whereupon the slaves of Uthman broke into his house, and forcibly seized the copy of Qur'an from him. This copy was burned at Uthman's

orders.

Uthman used the powers of state in dealing with men like Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood because they refused to compromise with their principles. All three of them had to pay a penalty for this refusal but they gladly paid it.

Uthman, however, also tangled with some of those men who were not too finicky about such things as principles. Among them were Abdur Rahman bin Auf and Amr bin Aas. Both of them were directly responsible for his accession to the throne.

Uthman and the King-makers

Uthman ought to be grateful to these two men who had made him khalifa of the Muslims. But if he was grateful to them, he did not show it. Instead of showing gratitude to them, he cruelly disillusioned one of them, and he made the other an implacable enemy for himself.

Abdur Rahman bin Auf

When Muslims lost all hope that Uthman would mend his ways, they turned, in sheer frustration, to Abdur Rahman bin Auf; told him that nothing in Dar-ul-Islam was right, everything was going wrong, and the responsibility for this state was entirely his since it was he who had made Uthman a khalifa.

Abdur Rahman admitted that what he had done was wrong, and he added:

“I never expected such shameful conduct from Uthman. He has disappointed us. And now let God be a Witness that I will never talk with him again.”

Abdur Rahman's refusal to talk with Uthman could not undo the harm that had been done nor could it change anything for anyone. But he upheld his “principle” and did not talk with Uthman to show him how he resented his (Uthman's) deeds.

Amr bin Aas

Amr bin Aas had conquered Egypt on his own initiative. After the conquest, he was appointed Egypt's governor by Umar. Some time before his own death, Umar had sent Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, the foster-brother of Uthman, to Egypt, to share fiscal responsibility with Amr bin Aas.

When Umar died and Uthman became khalifa, Abdullah bin Saad wrote to him that Amr bin Aas was manipulating public funds. Uthman immediately dismissed Amr, and made Abdullah the new governor and commander-in-chief of the army in Egypt.

After Amr's dismissal, the Byzantine emperor sent a fleet to Egypt which succeeded in capturing

Alexandria in A.D. 646. Abdullah bin Saad could not defend the province, and Uthman was forced to reinstate Amr as governor and commander-in-chief. Amr defeated the Byzantine forces, and reoccupied Alexandria. But as soon as Egypt was cleared of the Byzantine troops, Uthman dismissed Amr again, and gave all powers in Egypt to his foster-brother.

Egypt was the first love of Amr bin Aas. His greatest ambition in life was to rule Egypt. Denied now, not only the fruits of his labors but also the recognition of his great services, he returned to Medina, a most embittered, resentful and frustrated man. Since in Medina he had nothing to do, he occupied himself with the castigation of, and intrigue against, the author of his frustrations – Uthman. When the latter was killed by the rebels, he openly boasted:

"I am Abu Abdullah. When I make up my mind to do something, there is nothing that can stop me."

Sir John Glubb

"Amr ibn al-Aas, twice conqueror of Egypt, who had been summarily dismissed by Osman in favor of his foster-brother, was busy spreading disaffection in Medina." (*The Great Arab Conquests, p.299, 1963*)

"Amr ibn al-Aas, the conqueror of Egypt, had been living in Medina since his dismissal by Osman, and had been among the most acid critics of the old khalifa." (*The Great Arab Conquests, p.324, 1963*)

Amr bin Aas had many a sharp encounter with Uthman in the Great Mosque and in the latter's palace. In one of them, he demanded from him a public apology (Tauba) for his questionable conduct in governmental affairs.

Sir John Glubb

"Amr ibn al-Aas, when consulted (by Osman), replied brutally, 'You have subjected the whole nation to Beni Umayya. You have gone astray and so have the people. Either make up your mind to be just or give up the job." (*The Great Arab Conquests, p.300, 1967*)

Amr bin Aas denounced and cursed Uthman publicly, and did not spare even his father. Curiously, it never occurred to Uthman to use the same powers of state against him that he had invoked against Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood. He had, not one, but numerous confrontations with Amr bin Aas, and yet, he never threatened to banish him to Rabza, and he never ordered his slaves to throw him out of the Mosque or his palace, and to break his ribs.

Perhaps Uthman figured, like a man of prudence that he was, that the tongue-lashing that Amr bin Aas gave him, did not break any bones in his body after all and, therefore, it was not necessary to chastise him. Furthermore, they differed but they differed within the conventions of the exclusive "club" to which both of them belonged. But Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood, were "non-members." Therefore, the same rules did not apply to them which applied to a "member" like Amr bin Aas.

Causes of the Assassination of Uthman

Uthman was khalifa for twelve years. The power grid which he had inherited from Umar, worked relatively well for the first half of his reign. There was peace for him and for the Muslims. But in the second half, discontent began to build up against him, and it went on building up until it reached the flash point in A.D. 656 when an enraged and outraged mob killed him in his own palace in Medina.

The people had genuine causes for their discontent. They knew that unlimited quantities of gold and silver were coming into the treasury from the provinces but they did not see any of it. All of it disappeared into the private coffers of the members of the ruling class.

The ruling class was made up exclusively of the members of the clan of Banu Umayya – the clan to which Uthman himself belonged. The Umayyads, under Uthman, reached undreamed of affluence and the ultimate arrogance of power. The Muslims resented their arrogance, ostentation and hauteur, and the vulgar and inflammatory display by them of their riches and power.

Uthman dismissed all the governors and commanders who had been appointed by Abu Bakr and Umar, and in their stead, he appointed those men whose only “credentials” were that they were Umayyads. The people in the provinces groaned under the heels of these new governors and commanders. Drunk with power as they were, their excesses and highhandedness knew no bounds. They considered themselves above and beyond the reach of law.

Private purposes of the Umayyads took precedence over public purposes, and their “rights” to depredate, dominated the rights of the Muslim umma. The umma knew them to be only impious opportunists and arrant parasites who had seized control of the physical apparatus of Islam – the government of Medina. The provinces, therefore, were riddled with disaffection and rebellion.

The original patrons of the Umayyads were Abu Bakr and Umar. It were both of them who had, as it were, uncorked the bottle, but now it appeared to the *umma* that there was no way to squeeze the genie back into it.

Uthman also changed the balance of political equation by alienating such old party war–horses as Abdur Rahman bin Auf and Amr bin Aas. He antagonized Banu Ghiffar and its allies by banishing Abu Dharr to Rabza where the latter died. He antagonized the Banu Makhzoom and their allies by savagely beating up Ammar ibn Yasir, and he made the Banu Hudhail and the Banu Zuhra his enemies by having Abdullah ibn Masood beaten up by his slaves.

Uthman was safe as long as he banished or beat up such friends of the Apostle of God as Abu Dharr el–Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood. They did not belong to powerful tribes and Uthman had nothing to fear from them. But then he dismissed Amr bin Aas, the governor of Egypt. By doing so, he wrote his own prescription for disaster. Amr bin Aas raked up a hornets' nest for him.

Uthman appeared to be anxious to find new enemies. A new “recruit” into the ranks of his enemies was Ayesha, the widow of the Prophet. In the times of her father and Umar, she had been treated like a queen. But Uthman didn't show the same solicitude for her that they did. He even reduced her pension, and thus roused her anger. She called him Na'athal (a Jew of Medina), and openly incited the people against him by saying: “This Na'athal has relapsed into paganism. Kill him. May God kill him.”

R.V.C. Bodley

Othman had never been an outstanding figure when Mohammed was alive. Today he showed that he lacked the qualities of his predecessors. He was easily swayed and had no scruples in replacing military leaders and governors by his favorites, regardless of their competence. He also made the mistake of offending Aisha.

The slight in itself was small, but it was of a kind to arouse all of Aisha's most vindictive instincts: Othman reduced her pension to the level of that of the other widows!

Aisha had always deemed herself Mohammed's favorite. During her father's and Omar's reigns, she had been held in the same regard as when her husband was alive. But with her two protagonists dead, she knew that it might require all her wit to maintain her position.

When, therefore, Othman made his indirect attack, Aisha resolved that he was no worthy successor to her husband. Once she had settled that, all that remained was to find the best way to get rid of the enemy. The excuse or the methods employed had no bearing on the situation. When Aisha wanted something done, it was carried out regardless of ethics. In this case Othman gave Aisha every assistance. (*The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed, New York, 1946*)

Medina, once the symbol of piety and austerity, had changed. The city of the Prophet had become, after his death, the symbol of all the evils that foreign conquests and unrestrained capitalism bring in their wake. It must not be assumed that the Muslims of Medina acquiesced in all these aberrations and deviations from pristine Islam. They did not. But they had no power to check the abuse of power in the government. They protested but their protests fell on deaf ears.

The voices of Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood which rose in protest against the tide of materialism threatening to engulf Islam, were silenced by brute force. Finding themselves at a dead-end, the companions who were in Medina, began in 654 a campaign of writing letters to the Muslims in the provinces, asking them to make representations to the khalifa against the crimes of Marwan and the provincial governors, and to request him to remove them.

The Muslims in the provinces, themselves victims of tyranny and terror, and at a loss to know what to do, decided, after exchanging some letters with the companions, to send delegations to Medina to present their grievances to the khalifa, and to request him to remedy the situation. Uthman knew about the letters which the companions had sent to the provinces. But instead of taking remedial action, he

committed a faux pas. Tabari, the historian, says that Uthman wrote to Muawiya, his governor in Syria, as follows:

“The people of Medina have relapsed into apostasy; they have broken the pledge of loyalty to me. They are now contemplating treason. You, therefore, send to me immediately in Medina, the fierce warriors of Syria, mounted on swift animals.” (*History, Volume III*)

But Muawiya had no intention of obliging Uthman. Tabari further says:

“When Muawiya received Othman's letter, he decided to watch the situation, and he preferred not to oppose the companions of the Prophet openly because he knew that they were all united in their opposition to Othman.”

Muawiya was watching the situation how it would play into his hands. He was not the man who would be deterred by any moral compunctions to oppose the companions of the Prophet. He had the ability but he did not have the willingness to help Uthman.

Abul Fida, the historian, says that in 656 a delegation of 700 members came to Medina from Egypt, and similar delegations also came from Kufa and Basra. They came seeking redress of bureaucratic misrule and profligate mismanagement of public funds both in Medina and in the provinces.If Uthman had given them audience, had heard their grievances, and if he had only assured them that he was in sympathy with them, they would have been satisfied, and they would have returned to their homes. But unfortunately, he did not do so.

The Egyptian delegates who were encamped at the outskirts of Medina, sent a letter with an emissary to Uthman, asking him to give them audience. In the letter they had requested him to remove his foster-brother, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, from his position as governor of Egypt, and to institute certain administrative reforms. But instead of considering the request, Uthman ordered his slaves to throw the Egyptian emissary out.

The Egyptians then entered the city, and they told the other people what Uthman had done. The delegations of Kufa and Basra were already in Medina, and they declared their support for the Egyptians. All three delegations then pitched camp within sight of the palace of the khalifa. On the following Friday, Uthman led the congregational prayers, and he read the sermon. He could not have been more gauche and tactless. Standing in the pulpit, and addressing the delegations from Egypt and Iraq, he said:

“The Apostle of God had predicted that mischief-mongers would, one day, come to his city to disturb its peace. He cursed them all, and now you can see what you are doing.”

The congregation bridled at these remarks, and there was much commotion in the mosque. Someone threw a rock at Uthman which caught him in the face; he fell from the pulpit, and was carried out of the

mosque to his palace.

After this incident, Uthman was in a state of siege in his palace. But he could go into the Mosque, and he still led the prayers. A few days later, however, the Egyptians and the Iraqis forbade him to enter the Mosque unless he listened to what they had to say, and they appointed a certain Ghafiqi, a member of the Egyptian delegation, to lead them in prayer.

In his distress, Uthman sought Ali's aid in dispersing the besiegers. Ali said to him:

“Their grievances are genuine, and their demands reasonable. They will not disperse merely because I ask them to disperse. They will disperse only if you can give them your pledge to accept their demands.”

Uthman said:

“I give you the authority to negotiate with them. Whatever may be your terms of agreement with them, I will accept them.”

Ali met the leaders of the Egyptian delegation and talked with them. They agreed to return to Egypt if Uthman recalled his foster-brother, the infamous Abdullah bin Saad, and if, in his stead, he appointed Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as the new governor. Ali told Uthman what he would have to do if he wished the Egyptians to leave Medina.

Uthman agreed to appoint Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as the new governor of Egypt. This satisfied the Egyptians. Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr left Medina to take charge of his new duties, and many of the Egyptians accompanied him. Uthman could once again enter the Mosque and lead the Muslims in prayer. The incident, apparently, was closed.

But unfortunately it was not. Uthman's alter ego, Marwan, exhumed it, zombie-like. When he heard that the Egyptians had left Medina with the governor of their own choice, he gave Uthman the following advice:

“Some of the Egyptians have left Medina but those who came from the other provinces, are still here. The example of the Egyptians will encourage them also to put forward impossible demands. To prevent this from happening, you must make a speech in the Mosque saying ‘The Egyptians had only heard some rumors in their country. When they came to Medina, they discovered that whatever they had heard, was nothing but falsehood. They were satisfied and they went back to their homes. Now you too should leave Medina, and return to your homes.'“

Uthman did not want to tell such a brazen lie but Marwan had the power to make him do anything. After some hesitation, he agreed. He led a prayer, and after the sermon, said:

“O Muslims! The Egyptians had heard some false reports about their khalifa, and they came to Medina to verify them. Here they noticed that whatever they had heard, was all lies. They were, therefore,

satisfied, and they went back to Egypt. Now you too should return to your homes." (*Tabari, History, Volume III*)

These words were scarcely out of Uthman's mouth when pandemonium broke loose in the Mosque. Everyone began to yell at him: "Uthman, repent! Uthman repent! You are lying. Fear God. You are lying in God's Own House, and in the pulpit of His Messenger."

Uthman was seized with panic, and not knowing what to do, he had to "repent." He begged God to forgive his sin, and then went home.

Ali was shocked beyond belief at Uthman's volte-face, and at his brazenness in making a false statement in the Mosque. Nevertheless, he called on the old man once again, and chided him for what he had done. Uthman begged him to intervene once again on his behalf with the Muslims.

Ali told him that he (Uthman) could, if he wished, still win the confidence and respect of the Muslims if he admitted his errors, and if he sincerely apologized for them. He also warned him that if he did not, then the strangers who were in the city, might besiege him in his palace, and if they did, then he (Ali) might not be able to conciliate them.

Uthman, in a chastened mood, assured Ali that he would indeed do as he had advised. Ali, in turn, assured the Iraqis, the Egyptians and the other Muslims that the khalifa would accept all their demands, and he reminded them that they too had some duties, such as showing respect to him, obeying him and supporting him.

On the following day, Uthman went into the Mosque, admitted his errors, sought pardon and mercy from God, resolved not to repeat the errors, and promised to take immediate action upon the demands of the Muslims for reforms in the government.

The audience was deeply moved by the old khalifa's regrets, and by his assurances, and many tears were shed on both sides as a mark of a "change of heart." It appeared that the tears had washed away the rancors, the resentment and the bitterness of all concerned.

Through Ali's efforts, a reconciliation, apparently, was achieved, and it was a miracle. But as it turned out, it was a very short-lived miracle.

Uthman left the Mosque with many pious resolutions. But when he entered his palace, he found Marwan, his chief policy planner, awaiting him to give him a new piece of advice. But before he could say anything, Uthman's wife, Naila, who was also present, stopped him, and the following exchange took place between them:

Naila: For heaven's sake, you now keep your mouth shut after all the harm you have already done. If you don't, you will, without a doubt, compass the destruction of this old man (Uthman).You are, by your perversity, pushing him to the edge of the pit of death.

Marwan: Who are you to meddle in these affairs? Have you forgotten that you are the daughter of a man who did not even know how to take ablutions for the prayer?

Naila: You are the most unmitigated liar. Before mentioning my father, you ought to remember that you and your father are the accursed ones of God and His Apostle. If I were not exercising restraint because of this old man (Uthman), I would have taught you a lesson.

Naila then turned to her husband, and said to him:

“Do not listen to this foul and wretched man. What is he? Who gives him a hoot? If you want your own safety, then act upon Ali's advice. Don't you see how much prestige and influence he has among the Muslims?”

This was the most sagacious advice that Uthman ever received from any member of his own family but he didn't accept it. Naila then left the presence of her husband. As soon as she was out of sight, Marwan said to Uthman:

“You have committed a major blunder in the Mosque by admitting your errors, and by 'repenting' in public. Admission of your sins has now brought the crowds from the Mosque to the gate of your house. They are here only because they have seen your weakness. If you had been 'firm,' with them, they would not have dared to come here. The only way to deal with them, and to impress them with your power and authority, is to be 'firm' with them.”

A crowd of Muslims had, in fact, gathered outside the palace of the khalifa. But it was a peaceful crowd. Many Muslims from in and out of town had gathered hoping to hear some important announcement relating to changes in policy and administration. Uthman should have gone out to greet them. But he did not. Instead, he gave Marwan his permission to face them, and to “impress” them with his “firmness.”

Marwan's idea of being firm with the Muslims was to use violent, abusive and threatening language. With the new “carte blanche” from Uthman, he went out, and facing the crowd which was peaceful and friendly, said:

“Why have you gathered here? What are your intentions? Have you come to attack us or to rob us and to plunder us? If you have, then listen to this with attention. You will not succeed. You cannot wrest power and authority from our hands. We shall not be intimidated by you or by anyone else. Now begone from here. May God curse you.”

This time Uthman and Marwan had gone beyond the point of no return!

The Muslims were petrified with shock and horror at the insolence of Uthman's son-in-law. But they did not linger to palter with him. Instead, they went to see Ali, and reported to him the substance of Marwan's “speech.”

Ali was aghast to hear the story. Was there anything he could still do to arrest the declension of the situation? He pondered the question, and then called on Uthman and said to him:

“Is this the hospitality that you have offered to your brother Muslims? If you have lost all good sense before them, you ought, at least, to fear the wrath of God. In your anxiety to shield an apostate and a liar, you have lost that fear also, and now you can tell lies publicly and in the Mosque, and you can break solemn pledges without batting an eye. You have allowed Marwan to lead you wherever he wants to.

Remember, he will lead you into the pit of iniquity if he hasn't already done so, and you will never be able to extricate yourself from it. Now I shall not try to mediate between you and the Muslims. I shall take no interest in your affairs. This is my last visit to you. You do what you like. But if you still need me, then first you will have to get rid of Marwan. I shall dissociate myself with you as long as Marwan stands between you and me.”

Ali left Uthman's palace never to return. When Naila, the wife of Uthman, saw him leaving, she was deeply troubled. Events had proved that she had a better judgment than most of those around Uthman. Though her advice had not been accepted, she was still anxious to salvage whatever she could, and said to her husband:

“How many times I have told you to get rid of Marwan. He is a curse around your neck. You know that he is a man of bankrupt reputation, bankrupt morals and bankrupt sense. The situation is extremely dangerous, and is rapidly getting worse. You have lost your own credence by betraying the trust of the Muslims. Now if there is any man who can still save you, that man is Ali. If he doesn't help you, then you are lost.”

Flustered as Uthman was by the incident, he realized that what his wife had told him, was the absolute truth. He, therefore, sent a messenger requesting Ali to come. But Ali refused to go whereupon Uthman decided to go himself to see him. Not to be seen by anyone, he went at night.

Before Ali, the old khalifa poured out the story of his own helplessness, and apologized for his many errors, and gave him assurance that he would, in future, stand by his word, if he (Ali) would mediate between him (Uthman) and the Muslims. Ali, however, said:

“You stand in the pulpit of the Apostle of God, and make a false statement. You give the Muslims your pledge to walk in truth, and then you break it. Now everyone has seen how you honor your commitments. If Muslims want to see you and talk with you, Marwan abuses them and curses them. How do you expect me to trust you now with such a record as you have? I do not accept any responsibility for any of your acts. The alternatives are there, and the choice is yours. Get rid of Marwan. If you cannot do that, then do not expect anything from me. With Marwan at your side, and as your chief adviser, there is nothing I can do for you anyway.”

Uthman loved his son-in-law too much to part with him. Ali's terms, therefore, were not acceptable to

him, and he returned home. (Ali was not asking Uthman to banish Marwan from Medina as the Apostle of God had done; he was only asking him not to be misled by him.)

While Marwan was jousting with the Muslims in Medina, Uthman had been writing letters to all his governors asking them to send their troops to Medina so he could "discipline" the "rebels." His best hopes lay in Muawiya, and to him he wrote numerous letters, urging him to bring his warriors to Medina or to send them with his trusted officers. But neither Muawiya nor any other of his governors responded to his signals of distress.

One day a man saw Uthman outside his palace, and remarked: "How I wish I could drag you and those around you in dirt." Uthman said that those who were around him, were none other than the companions of the Apostle of God. He retorted that those "companions" must be Hakam, Marwan, Walid bin Aqaba, Saeed bin Aas, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, and the rest of the brood. Uthman murmured: "Let the army come, and then I will teach you a lesson."

But the army never came. Muawiya temporized, and figured that if there was chaos in Medina, he would maneuver in it, and if possible, would run away with the khilafat itself.

When these events were taking place in Medina, bad news came from the north. Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, the governor designate of Egypt, had reached Elath on the Red Sea arm called the Gulf of Aqaba, and was soon going to enter Egypt. He was camping in Elath when some members of his entourage noticed a lone camel-rider coming from Medina.

They stopped him for interrogations, and finding his answers evasive, frisked him. A long search of his person and baggage yielded a letter hidden in a leaden tube at the bottom of his saddlebag. The letter was addressed to Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, the governor of Egypt, and it bore the seal of the khalifa himself. They brought the letter and the letter-carrier before Muhammad. The latter broke the seal, and was startled to read the following message:

"When Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr and members of his party arrive in Egypt, seize them, and kill them all, and you carry on your duties as governor of Egypt."

(As noted earlier, Abdullah ibn Saad ibn Abi Sarh was not in Egypt at this time; he was in Palestine.)

At first Muhammad could not believe his own eyes. How could Uthman order his governor to kill him and his companions? He read and reread the letter until its meaning began to sink in his mind.

Muhammad decided to return to Medina. In Medina, he went into the Mosque of the Prophet, and placed the letter before the companions for their perusal. Some of them and members of Muhammad's party, called on Uthman, to show him the letter, and the following exchange took place between them:

The companions: Did you write this letter?

Uthman: No.

The companions: Whose seal is on this letter?

Uthman: Mine.

The companions: Whose writing is this?

Uthman: My secretary's.

The companions: Whose slave is this letter-carrier?

Uthman: Mine.

The companions: Who sent him to Egypt?

Uthman: I do not know.

The companions: The seal on the letter is yours; the writing is your secretary's; the slave Egypt. If you are so unaware, then it would be both in your interest who carried it, is yours; and still you do not know who sent him to and in the interest of the Muslim umma that you abdicate from khilafat. Let some other man, conscientious and fit for the job, take charge of the government of the Muslims.

Uthman: Khilafat is a robe that God has given me, and I cannot take it off under any circumstance. What I can do, however, is to 'repent.'

The companions: Your repentance cannot hoodwink us any more. Already you have repented many times. You, therefore, quit and make room for someone worthier than you for the high office of khalifa. You say that you do not know who sent this letter. If you are telling the truth, then it cannot be anyone other than your son-in-law who is your secretary. He wrote it and he sent it. He is the real criminal who was going to take the lives of many innocent Muslims. Now if you are sincere, then surrender him to us so that we may investigate him, and uphold justice.

Uthman: I cannot surrender Marwan to you.

The companions: We then understand that you are an accomplice in the crime, and you too wanted innocent Muslims to be killed upon their arrival in Egypt merely because you and Marwan do not like them.

The companions then went to the Mosque to report to the Iraqis and the Egyptians the outcome of their parleys with the khalifa. The Egyptians, thereupon, laid siege to Uthman's palace. The delegates who came from Kufa and Basra also pitched their tents around the palace of the khalifa, and declared that he would be their prisoner until he gave up Marwan to them for trial and judgment.

During the siege, drinking water ran out in the palace. Uthman appealed to some of the companions to send water but they ignored his appeals. Finally, he sent word to Ali, and the latter sent water with armed guards. The guards had to fight their way into the palace to deliver the life-giving and life-saving fluid.

Uthman still hoped that one of his governors, probably Muawiya, would send his troops who would annihilate the unruly and presumptuous rebels. The rebels, in the meantime, were tightening their noose around his neck.

Uthman's Assassination

Many minor incidents occurred during the siege of the palace of Uthman. There were occasions when he saw with his own eyes some of the principal companions of the Prophet among the besiegers urging them to keep their pressure on the besieged.

One day it occurred to a certain Ibn Ayyadh, one of the companions of the Prophet, to mediate between the besiegers and the besieged in an attempt to restore peace to Medina. He came to the palace gate and called Uthman by his name. Uthman peeked out of the window above, and acknowledged the call. Ibn Ayyadh begged him to abdicate and thereby to put an end to the state of anarchy in the city, and also to save the Muslims from possible bloodshed. He had not concluded his appeal yet when one of Uthman's pickets killed him with an arrow.

A cry of anguish went up from the besiegers. They asked Uthman to give up the killer to them but he said:

“How can I give up my own supporters and protectors to you so you kill them? Never.”

Uthman's answer had the effect of a spark on dry powder. The crowd surged forward to enter the palace and to capture the murderer of Ibn Ayyadh. Marwan, Saeed bin Aas, Mughira bin Khins, and the mercenaries of Uthman tried to defend the palace from within, and to repel the besiegers. The latter attacked the other gates also but found defenders at every one of them.

While this struggle was going on at the gates of the palace of Uthman, an Ansari, a certain Amr bin Hazm, called the besiegers to his house which was adjacent to the house of Uthman. They entered his house, went on top, and from there descended into Uthman's house with drawn swords. There was a skirmish with the mercenaries some of whom were killed but all members of the Banu Umayya – Marwan, Saeed bin Aas and Mughira bin Khins among them – succeeded in escaping through a secret door. Marwan is said to have been wounded but recovered later. In the melee someone killed Uthman. His wife, Naila, is said to have lifted her hand to defend him from a sword, and her fingers were sliced off in the attempt.

Uthman was killed in his palace, abandoned by the Umayyads. Twelve years after his election or

selection as khalifa, his caliphate lay in shambles; its personnel decimated; its promises discredited, its convictions and capabilities overturned.

Uthman was 84 years old at his death. He had demolished the house built so laboriously by Abu Bakr, Umar and Abdur Rahman bin Auf. He had failed to assert convincingly the qualities of leadership, competence and inspiration essential to a khalifa. He had staggered down into senility and had lost his way.

Uthman remained a prisoner in his palace for 49 days. He implored Muawiya to come to Medina and to save his life. But Muawiya had one “answer” to his appeals – silence! Judging by his studied silence, it appears that Muawiya could not have cared less for Uthman. It is astonishing that many supporters of Uthman criticize Ali for not “saving” the life of Uthman even though he (Ali) did not have any means for doing so; but they condone Muawiya's indifference to him (Uthman) even though he had all the means to save him (Uthman). A tiny contingent of his army, if he had sent it to Medina, could have routed or slaughtered all the rebels but he did not!

Amr bin Aas was one of the companions of the Prophet. Uthman dismissed him twice as governor of Egypt. He never forgave Uthman for his dismissal; he was blistering toward him. It is entirely possible that it was he who engineered Uthman's murder, and he didn't even make a secret of his intentions. But he was full of guile and cunning, and managed to escape the indictment of history.

Two other agents – provocateurs in the murder of Uthman were Talha and Zubayr. They fanned the flames of public wrath and hatred against Uthman same as Amr bin Aas did. Both of them believed, same as Amr bin Aas and Muawiya did, that they had nothing to lose in a breakdown of law and order, and had probably everything to gain. All of them were accessories to the crimes against Uthman either by direct complicity or by their acquiescence and indifference.

When Uthman was killed, Medina was full of women and men of great distinction. Among them were the widows of the Prophet except Ayesha who was in Makkah; Saad bin Abi Waqqas, Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab; the Muhajireen and the Ansar; the veterans of the battles of Badr and Uhud; and many of those companions who had taken the pledge of the Tree at Hudaybiyya. But except Ali, no one among them all, showed the least anxiety to save the life of the khalifa.

Ali left nothing undone to save Uthman but neither he nor anyone else could have saved a man who was resolved to ruin himself. Marwan frustrated all his (Ali's) efforts to reverse the skid of the caliphate, and foiled all his attempts to reconcile the khalifa and the Muslims. He (Marwan) stood like an insurmountable barrier between them.

Uthman paid heed neither to the entreaties of his own wife, Naila, nor to the warnings of Ali, but persisted in courting disaster. To him, Marwan's twaddle was nothing less than inspiration itself, and to him alone, he (Uthman) gave his first loyalty.

Among his supporters, Uthman could count only two men – Marwan and Saeed bin Aas – both of them the accursed ones of the Apostle of God. Sunni jurists and theologians attach great importance to the principle of consensus. Here there was consensus of the Companions of the Prophet in withholding their support from Uthman, and in opposing him.

They withheld their support from him, and they opposed him almost en bloc. They abandoned him, to be slaughtered, in the words of Umar, by "the wolves of the Arabs." Who was right and who was wrong? It's a question for the Sunni jurists and theologians to answer.

The Aftermath of the Assassination of Uthman

When Ali ascended the throne of khilafat, he found the people in Medina divided into two groups. One of these groups was clamoring for vengeance for Uthman's blood. The other group maintained that Uthman had only paid the penalty for his impolitic deeds, and the question of seeking vengeance for his blood, therefore, did not arise. No matter what Ali did, it was inevitable that one of these two groups would rebel against his authority.

The new government was extremely shaky and Ali was struggling to consolidate it when the first of these two groups began to press him to penalize the murderers of Uthman. He said to them:

"I am not unaware of the need of penalizing the murderers of Uthman. But do we have the power to do so? At the moment, it is they who have the power. They can dictate to us; we cannot dictate to them. If they wish, they can do harm to us, and we cannot do any harm to them. Can you suggest any way we can overcome them or circumvent them?"

Medina, at this time, was, in fact, in the grip of the group which was opposed to Uthman – the rebels. It was their writ which ran in Medina, and no one dared to challenge them. If Ali decided to impose penalties on them, it was most probable that they would resist him by force of arms. They were conscious of their own strength, and of the weakness of the Medina government.

If the first group, i.e., the vengeance-seekers, had detected any weakness in the rebels, then it would have challenged them during the siege of Uthman's palace. But it did not. During the siege, its leaders went underground. But as soon as Ali was elected caliph, they came out, and began to demand action from him in apprehending the rebels who had killed Uthman.

The leaders of the first group decided to challenge Ali. It was the opinion of Ayesha, who was one of them, and who was already in Makkah, that they should attack Medina because the murderer or murderers of Uthman were all there. But Talha and Zubayr, the other two leaders, who had told Ali that they were going to Makkah to perform Umra (the lesser pilgrimage), disagreed with her, and said:

"O mother of the believers! Forget Medina. Our army cannot fight against the rebels who are there. We have, therefore, to go to Basra." (*Tabari, History, Vol. III*)

Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, the leaders of the first group, had an army; they had the weapons and they had the money, and yet they shied away from attacking Medina because they lacked the strength to overcome the rebels. If they could not fight against the rebels even though they had an army, how could Ali who did not have an army, fight against them?

If Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr sincerely wanted vengeance, they ought to have attacked Medina instead of going hundreds of miles across the desert to Basra. But they could see that the rebels were simply too many to be penalized. The people of Medina, of Egypt, of Kufa and of Basra, were all embroiled in the murder of Uthman, directly or indirectly.

There were those companions who wrote letters to the rebel leaders, and invited them to Medina, and there were those Muhajireen and Ansar who gave their moral support to them (to the rebels). Without their tacit support, the rebels might never have dared to kill the incumbent khalifa in his own house.

There were two ways of penalizing the murderer(s) of Uthman. One was to kill every man who had taken part, directly or indirectly, in his murder regardless of who he was – a Muhajir, an Ansar, an Egyptian or an Iraqi. This was clearly impossible. But if it were possible, the State still could not kill thousands of men in retaliation for the murder of one man.

The other way was to investigate the murder, apprehend the real culprit or culprits, bring them to trial, and in the event of the crime being proved, to execute him or them. Ali was more than willing to adopt this course but first he had to restore law and order in the country after the anarchy and chaos that had lasted many months.

Uthman's murder was not the result of any sudden provocation that he gave. Long and protracted negotiations had preceded the crime itself. He was murdered after the failure of all those negotiations. Delegations came to see him from distant cities, and told him about the excesses of his governors. He promised to remedy the situation but he failed to keep his promise.

When a delegation reminded him of his own pledge to dismiss one of his governors, he said:

“You are suggesting that I should dismiss those of my governors whom you do not happen to like, and that I should appoint men of your choice to run the government. If I were to act upon your wishes, I would become a nonentity, and you would be exercising all governmental authority and not I.” (*Tarikh Kamil – Ibn Atheer, Vol. III, p. 86*)

The delegates were incensed by Uthman's answer, and they said:

“You lack the ability to set right the wrongs of your government. You must, therefore, abdicate from khilafat. If you do not, we shall be compelled to take some drastic step.”

Uthman said:

“Are you threatening to kill me? If so, then what is the crime for the commission of which you would kill me? In Islam, execution is the penalty for:

(**a**) murder of some innocent person;

(**b**) apostasy;

(**c**) rape of a chaste woman.

I have not committed any of these crimes. On what other ground you want to kill me?”

The delegates' reply was as follows:

“For those men who spread mischief on earth, or usurp the rights of others, the penalty prescribed in the Book of God is execution. You have wantonly abused the powers of government. You banished from Medina a most honorable companion of the Apostle of God, and your lackeys have beaten up other friends of his. You have foisted drunkards and apostates upon the umma as its rulers. You and your governors have terrorized and tyrannized the Muslims, and have usurped their rights. You have done all this and more. Even so, if you abdicate voluntarily, we shall not meddle with you, and will leave you in peace.”

But Uthman did not want to abdicate because, he said, that the khilafat was a “robe” which God had given him, and he could not take it off.

God can, of course, give the robe of khilafat to any one He wishes. But the robe of khilafat which Uthman was wearing, was given to him, not by God, but by Abdur Rahman bin Auf!

This dialogue makes it plain that the people took the last, desperate step only when everything else failed. They were convinced that Uthman's execution was right. Their conviction was further strengthened by the words and the deeds of such dignitaries as Ayesha, Talha, Zubayr and Amr bin Aas each of whom had prescribed death for him, directly or indirectly.

Uthman and “Abdullah bin Saba”

The khilafat of Uthman had saddled the Muslims with a crippled government, and the host of economic, political and social dislocations that sprang from it, were met by an uncertain and often contradictory response. The dislocations eventually caused the death of the khalifa himself.

Many Sunni historians find it very difficult to admit that Uthman brought destruction upon himself. They are desperately anxious to “explain” or to rationalize why things went awry in his khilafat. But how? Their anxiety led them to create a mysterious and a sinister character whom they called “Abdullah bin Saba.”

The creation of Abdullah bin Saba “solved” many of the problems of the Sunni historians. He made

transference of guilt possible for them. According to his creators, he was a Jew from Yemen who had accepted Islam, migrated to Medina, and then went around preaching false and heretical doctrines, and spreading disaffection and hatred against Uthman. He was, they claim, responsible for all the sorrows and misfortunes, and eventually, for the death itself, of Uthman!

Abdullah bin Saba, it appears, suddenly became the most powerful figure in the entire Dar-ul-Islam. After all, it was he who toppled a khalifa from his throne, and threw the whole government of the Muslims into disarray.

What Abdullah bin Saba was doing, was high treason. Was anything easier for Marwan to do than to capture him and kill him for his treason, if he was in Medina? Or, was anything easier for a provincial governor or even for a petty official than to seize him, and to snuff out his life, if he was in one of the provinces? No. But for some mysterious reason, he swaggered from town to town and from province to province, flaying the khalifa, and no one ever touched him. He apparently lived a charmed existence!

It is amazing that Uthman could banish such a high-ranking companion of Muhammad Mustafa as Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari to Rabza (Abu Dharr died in Rabza); he could beat up Ammar ibn Yasir into unconsciousness, and he could break the ribs of Abdullah ibn Masood, both most distinguished companions of Muhammad; yet he could give free rein to Amr bin Aas and "Abdullah bin Saba" to rouse the Muslims against himself with their stinging diatribes.

When Uthman was killed, "Abdullah bin Saba" probably figured that he had accomplished his mission, and he went "underground." But only a few months later, he "resurfaced" on the eve of the battle of Basra (the battle of the Camel). It was, his creators claim, he who was responsible for that deplorable battle.

However, during or immediately after the battle, he disappeared again, and this time he disappeared forever. It is truly remarkable that he could vanish without leaving a trail or a trace behind him. His act of vanishing was so perfect as if he had never "existed."

Actually, the "necessity" which had led to the invention of Abdullah bin Saba, had ceased to exist. His creators, therefore, junked him. But even today, he is exhumed from time to time when Sunni historians want to "explain" the unpalatable facts of that epoch.

Dr. Taha Husain, the modern Egyptian historian, has exploded the Abdullah bin Saba myth in his book, *al-Fitna-tul-Kubra.* He has pointed out that Tabari is the first historian who wrote about Abdullah bin Saba. He heard about him from one Umar bin Saif. Abdullah bin Saba was born in the head of Umar bin Saif.

But in the sources before Tabari, Abdullah bin Saba has not been mentioned anywhere. This is strange because such an important "personage" as Abdullah bin Saba who disrupted the Muslim society in the times of Uthman, should have received no notice from pre-Tabari historians.

Dr. Taha Husain further raises the question that even if it is assumed that Abdullah bin Saba was preaching false and heretical doctrines, was it he who “tempted” Uthman to appoint a character like Marwan as his prime minister?

The Muhajireen and the Ansar resented Marwan's elevation since in their sight he was little more than a leper. And was Uthman acting upon the advice and guidance of Abdullah bin Saba when he dismissed the governors of the provinces who had been appointed by Umar bin al-Khattab, and appointed his own relatives in their stead? This was one of the major causes of disaffection in the provinces.

The story of Abdullah bin Saba is a typical attempt at an in-house whitewash. But the whitewash has not been white enough!

If on the one hand, the apologists of Uthman have created such a mythical character as Abdullah bin Saba to mask his (Uthman's) misjudgment and misgovernment, on the other they have chosen to deny the truth of the facts of history.

In many of the writings on early Islamic history, appearing in recent years, Uthman's apologists have gone to the extent of denying that he dismissed any of the governors appointed by Abu Bakr or Umar, or, that there was anything reprehensible in it if he did so, or, that he committed any other error.

It is entirely the business and the prerogative of the protagonists of Uthman if they wish to live with falsehood and deception or rather with self-deception. But bitter and unpleasant truths will not just vanish merely because someone does not like them. This is what the modern Egyptian historian, Dr. Taha Husain, writes on this subject in his book, *al-Fitna-tul-Kubra* (The Great Upheaval):

“We should not follow those people who deny the veracity of the reports which have come down to us about the disputes and the disagreements of the companions of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, and the disturbances which took place at the same time. If we do that, we shall, in effect, be denying the entire basis of the history of Islam, from the time the Prophet proclaimed his mission.

Those men who reported the disagreements of the companions, and who reported the political upheavals of their time, are the same who reported the early struggles, the campaigns, the conquests, and the life (Sira) of the Prophet and the khulafa (Abu Bakr and Umar). In this matter, we are not free to pick and choose. We cannot take only what we like and reject what we dislike. We cannot call some reports true and others false.

“One thing about which there can be no doubt is that Muslims were divided in the matter of Uthman, and their divisions ended in his death, and they have never been reunited since.

“But those divisions and disagreements had their causes. It is true that Muslims killed Uthman but they did not do so without any causes or reasons.” (*al- Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published in Cairo in 1959*)

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