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## God! Be a witness

Ayesha's army forced its way into the city of Basra during a very cold night. They killed many citizens in the masjid. Then they entered the house of Uthman bin Hanif and maltreated and insulted him.

Talha and Zubayr resented very much the treatment meted out by the soldiers to Uthman bin Hanif because he too was one of the distinguished companions of the Prophet. (We have already written in detail in "Hazrat Amirul Mo'mineen" part III that the ill–treatment with Uthman bin Hanif at Basra was done on Talha and Zubayr's orders). They went to Ayesha and expressed their grief over that incident. In reply she ordered that Uthman bin Hanif might be put to death. The order was about to be complied with when a woman cried: "O Mother of the Faithful! For God's sake take pity on the son of Hanif. Just have regard for his being a companion of the Prophet".

Ayesha thought over the matter for a while, and then said: "All right. Do not kill him but make him a prisoner". (Tarikh Tabari etc.)

An officer of Ayesha's army however said: "Beat him (Uthman bin Hanif) severely and pull the hair of his beard".

The soldiers beat him mercilessly, pulled the hair of his head, beard, eyebrows and eyelashes and then made him prisoner.

Talha and Zubayr began roaming about in both the armies and delivered speeches asking the people to take revenge of Uthman's murder on Ali. While Zubayr was delivering one such speech a man belonging to the tribe of Abd al–Qais stood up and said to him: "Please keep quiet for a while because I want to say something". Then he addressed the Muhajirs who formed part of the people of the camel in these words: "O Muhajirs! You are the people who embraced Islam earlier than others and are, therefore, superior to them in this respect.

After the Prophet's death you chose a man for the caliphate without consulting us. After his death you chose another man as caliph without consulting us and we accepted him. After the second caliph the question of selecting his successor was decided by a six-man committee and you took the oath of allegiance to Uthman without consulting us. Then you were dissatisfied with him and killed him without consulting us. Now you have taken oath of allegiance to Ali without consulting us. We have not declined

to accept either of them as Head of the State and have endorsed your choice.

Now you should tell us why you have got ready to fight against Ali. Has he misappropriated the war booty, and deprived you of it? Has he done anything unlawful? Has he committed any offence which has disqualified him for the caliphate? And then the questions: Why are you so keen that we, too, should join you in fighting against Ali?" He ended his speech with these words: "When no such thing has happened why have you created all this nuisance?".

None could give any reply to his speech. All were dumbfounded. However, brute force follows no logic. The supporters of Talha and Zubayr attacked the man but his kinsmen came to his help. Fierce fighting took place and eventually the speaker was killed along with seventy persons of his tribe.

The people of the camel gained control over all the key points and took hold of the amount of revenue as well as the Public Treasury. Zubayr and his son Abdullah distributed the entire property of the Public Treasury among their supporters.

Hakim bin Jabalah who was obedient and faithful to the Commander of the Faithful was very much disturbed on account of the activities of these people. He gathered many of his supporters and attacked the people of the camel. He said about Talha and Zubayr: "They took oath of allegiance to Ali voluntarily and promised to obey him. Now they have come to fight against him as his opponents and want to avenge the murder of Uthman. They have created differences between us although we belonged to the same city and were the neighbours of one another. O Lord! It is not the intention of either of them to avenge the murder of Uthman".

Hakim was killed and so was his son and brother. Thereafter Talha and Zubayr mercilessly put the people of Basra to sword. The people of the camel had now full control over Basra, and had become its despotic rulers. The people of Basra took oath of allegiance to Talha and Zubayr – some of them voluntarily and others in duress. After having subdued Basra, the people of the camel became over–joyous. Zubayr said: "If I had one thousand horsemen I would have proceeded to meet Ali and I am sure that I would have killed him before he arrived here."

Ayesha conveyed the good news of her success to Hafsa who was in Madina. She wrote: "I have to inform you that Ali has halted at a place called Zi Qar. He is very much afraid because he has received news about our large army and equipment. At present his position is that of a camel whose feet would be cut off if it steps forward and who would be slaughtered if it goes backward".

Talha and Zubayr now resorted to mean and indecent propaganda against Ali. Propaganda really means that news is spread according to one's own wish. Truth is shown to be falsehood and vice versa, and they make a mountain of a mole-hill.

As has been narrated by Ibn Abi'l Hadid on the authority of Madaini and Waqidi they (Talha and Zubayr) began addressing the people thus: "O people of Basra! If Ali is victorious he will kill you one by one, and

destroy your honour and dignity. He will kill your children and enslave your women. You must, therefore, defend your dignity and honour and fight against him like one who is prepared to lay down his life for the sake of his honour and family."

Notwithstanding this open enmity and organised attack the Commander of the Faithful did not take any immediate steps against them, but waited for them to take the initiative. He hoped that they might even then forsake rebellion and avoid bloodshed, because the pretext on which they wished to fight against him was absolutely flimsy. He hoped that they might realize that the path which they were pursuing would deprive the caliphate of its dignity and the public who had pinned high hopes on the justice, piety and steadfastness of Ali would be disheartened.

From Rabazah Ali sent letters to the people of Kufa and invited them to join him against the people of the camel. Abu Musa Ash`ari, the Governor of Kufa, refrained from assisting him and also prevented others from rendering him any assistance. The Commander of the Faithful dismissed him immediately from his office.

After the people of the camel had occupied Basra the people belonging to the tribe of Abd al–Qais left the city and gathered at a place between Zi Qar and Basra. They were waiting for Ali to arrive there so that they might join his army. Nine thousand Kufans also joined him. Imam Ali delivered a lengthy speech before them. He said inter alia: "I have called you to assist me against the people of Basra. My only object is reconciliation. If the people of Basra desist from their activities my object will be fulfilled. However, if they persist in their stubbornness we shall deal with them mildly and shall refrain from fighting till they commit oppression and resort to fighting. We shall leave no stone unturned to achieve reconciliation and shall prefer peace to disturbance in all circumstances".

From what has been stated above it becomes evident as to what a great difference there was between the two parties. On the one side there were the people of the camel who accused Ali of something of which they should have accused themselves. Ali was absolutely innocent of any such accusation. These persons accused him unjustly, violated their oath of allegiance to him, and rebelled against him. They decided to fight against him and also incited others to do so, although those persons had sworn allegiance to him. They raided one of his cities under his control, insulted and beat the governor, maltreated and killed the citizens and divided the property of the Public Treasury among themselves although it belonged to all the Muslims. They also thought of attacking Ali with one thousand horsemen and assassinating him.

On the other side was the Commander of the Faithful the true Imam to whom all the people had taken the oath of allegiance. Of course, he was not prepared to accept their oath but they insisted upon it, and said that they could not find anyone else fit to be their leader and if he agreed to accept the office of caliph their differences would come to an end. These people then asked others also to take the oath. Ali accepted the allegiance of those who took the oath and let go those who did not. He never compelled anyone to swear allegiance to him.

A few days later, however, he saw that some persons were instigating others to revolt against him and were trying to create mischief and disorder. They were attacking his treasurers, governors and followers and planning to remove him from the caliphate and to assassinate him. He received news about all their activities, but he did not nurse any grudge against them in his mind. He addressed his supporters in words which show what a high regard he had for humanity. He said: "O People of Kufa! I have called you to assist me against our brethren in Basra ......".

He did not content himself with the manifestation of this kindness but also sent messages to Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr asking them to refrain from rebellion and oppression and invited them to help him towards unity and good will.

Here we quote an incident which will go to show what idea he had about his opponents, and what responsibilities he felt after his being selected as caliph, about equity and justice, and why the people were inclined towards him.

When the Commander of the Faithful reached near Basra the people of that city sent to him a man named Kulaib Jarmi to find out the causes of differences between him and the people of the camel, so that the position which was till then doubtful in their minds might become clear.

Ali explained to him the entire position. He told him how those people had taken oath of allegiance to him but later violated it in order to grab the caliphate themselves. Kulaib was convinced that Ali's stand was just, and he admitted it before the Commander of the Faithful. Thereupon Ali asked him to swear allegiance to him. He, however, said in reply that he had come as the representative of the people of Basra and could not take any such action till he returned to the city and submitted a report to those who had sent him.

The Commander of the Faithful then said to him: "Suppose those people had sent you to locate vegetation and water and you had informed them that these things were present at such and such place, but they had declined to go there and had gone instead to a barren place, what would have been your line of action? Would you have gone to the place where a spring and vegetation were there, or followed those people to the barren land?" Kulaib replied: "I should certainly have gone to the place where there was water and verdure". Thereupon Ali said: "Then stretch your hand and take oath of allegiance to me". The man said: "By God! After being reduced to silence by your convincing argument there is no reason for my opposing you. Now stretch your hand and I swear allegiance to you".

When the people of the camel arrayed themselves against him the Commander of the Faithful Ali said to his army: "O People! Control yourselves and do not attack them, nor say anything with your tongue. They are your brethern-in-faith. Bear injustice with patience, and do not begin fighting because whoever quarrels today will have to account for it on the Day of Judgment".

Ali continued to make efforts for peace in this manner. At the time of leaving for Basra with twenty thousand men his real intention was to advise the people of the camel to refrain from mischief and

rebellion and to invite them to peace and unity.

He loved peace so much that even when the two armies were arrayed against each other and there was no hope for reconciliation, he made an earnest effort at the last moment to avoid bloodshed. On seeing Talha and Zubayr he stepped forward absolutely unarmed, to indicate that he wanted peace and not war, and called out "O Zubayr! Come to me". Zubayr came forward fully armed. When Ayesha saw this she shouted with fear "No fighting!" because she was aware that fighting with Ali meant sure death for Zubayr. She believed that Ali's enemy however strong and brave he might be would surely meet his fate.

However, when Ayesha and her supporters saw that Ali and Zubayr were embracing each other they were very much perplexed.

Ali kept Zubayr stuck to his bosom for a long time and began conversing with him in a very kind and affectionate manner. He said: "Woe be upon you! Why have you revolted against me?" Zubayr replied: "We want to avenge the murder of Uthman". Ali said: "May God kill that one from among us two whose hands have been besmeared with Uthman's blood".

The part played in the murder of Uthman by Talha and Zubayr was as much known to themselves as it was known to Ali and others like Ibn Abbas who had made the following suggestion to him on his assuming the office of caliph: "Appoint the son of Talha as the Governor of Basra and that of Zubayr as the Governor of Kufa, and allow Mu`awiya to continue as the Governor of Syria, till the conditions become normal and the people feel safe and secure, and the murderers of Uthman and those who want to avenge his blood are pacified".

Ali had all these things in view and the following words of Talha and Zubayr were also ringing in his mind: "We are taking the oath of allegiance to you subject to the condition that we shall be allowed to participate in the affairs of the caliphate". As such all their activities were only means of securing the caliphate, none had in view the revenge for the murder of Uthman.

Before the two armies came face to face with each other Ali ordered his troops to array themselves. Then he gave them instructions: "Look here! Don't shoot an arrow and don't attack with a spear or a sword to start the battle, so that you may not be blamed (for starting the battle)".

A few moments later the people of the camel killed a soldier of Ali's army with their arrows. Ali said loudly: "O God! Bear witness". Then another man was killed and the Commander of the Faithful again said: "O God! Bear witness". Then Abdullah bin Badil was killed and his brother brought his dead body before Ali. Thereupon he said again: "O God! Bear witness", and ordered his army to attack. Then fierce fighting started.

With sword in hand Ali attacked the rebels. His sword flashed like a flame of fire. He drove back the Quraysh and put their centre as well as the right and left wings in disorder. The infantry which was being commanded by Zubayr flew away. Zubayr became encircled by the soldiers of Ali's army, but none

attacked him and allowed him to escape. Ammar Yasir launched a severe attack. When Zubayr felt that Ammar might strike him with his sword he said: "O Abul Yaqzan! (Kunyah of Ammar) are you going to kill me?" "Not at all, O Abu Abdillah!" said Ammar, and stepped aside.

Ammar's treatment of Zubayr was just like that which was meted out by Ali in the Battle of Siffin to Amr bin Aas. Its details will be given later. In fact Ammar and his compatriots had been trained by their teacher Ali – the real Commander of the Faithful, to respect human life, as far as possible, even in the battlefield.

Zubayr quitted the battlefield and went away to a valley called al-Saba`. It has been said by some narrators that ever since Ali had embraced him and reminded him of old love and affection his conscience had heen awakened and he was not inclined to fight. However, Ayesha and his son Abdullah reproached him on this account and he was obliged to stay on in the battlefield. After Ammar had spared his life he decided to go away.

Ayesha tried her best to keep up the morale of her army which consisted of thirty thousand men. She called the members of various tribes by name and asked them to fight bravely to avenge the murder of Uthman. The result was that the fighting became all the more intense. Some of the warriors threw away their weapons and attacked each other with their hands.

Ayesha's standard was fixed on the back of her camel and her supporters were guarding it with great zeal. When one of them was killed another took his place. There were no signs of either party winning the battle. Ayesha's supporters were also fighting very bravely. Slogans in favour of Ayesha and against Ali and vice versa could be heard from both the sides. The fighting was so intense that it is difficult to find its example in history.

So many persons were killed in the battle that the whole battlefield was strewn with dead bodies. This state of affairs worried Ali very much. He, therefore, thought of a plan which, when implemented, might ensure the safety of those who were still alive. He ordered his soldiers to cut off the feet of Ayesha's camel. Some brave men rushed forth at once and struck their swords on the feet of the camel. The camel staggered and fell down. Thereupon all those who were guarding it ran away and the entire army followed suit. Talha and Zubayr were also killed.

As regards Zubayr's death the versions differ. One of them is that a man named Amr bin Jazmooz pursued him upto the valley of al-Saba` and killed him there with his spear. Talha was killed by Marwan with an arrow, although he had been fighting side by side with him so long as the battle lasted. It is reported that while shooting the arrow Marwana had said: "After this time I may not get an opportunity to avenge the murder of Uthman".

Those who are aware of the mentality and past actions of Marwan can very well understand that this action of Marwan was not something unusual for him. He acted according to the general policy of Bani Umayyah viz. to remove from the path everyone who aspired to become a caliph, so that there should

be none left to contend with Bani Umayyah on this account.

As regards Marwan himself he was made captive and brought before the Commander of the Faithful. He hoped to be forgiven and his hope was fulfilled. Ali forgave him.

The result of this battle was very dreadful. Seventeen thousand supporters of Ayesha and one thousand and seventy persons belonging to the army of Ali were killed. All these poor men fell victims to the greed of the opponents of Ali.

When some companions of Ali thought of killing Ayesha (as she was responsible for all this trouble), Ali at once stopped them and issued the following proclamation: "None who is wounded should be killed and none who flees should be pursued. Whoever lays down his arms or remains indoors shall be safe".

The entire history of warfare in the world goes to show that Ali was the most magnanimous, noble—minded and forgiving person and the treatment which he meted out to his opponents was extremely gentle.

After the hostilities were over Ali looked at the battlefield and tears trickled down from his eyes when he saw the human misery and bloodshed which could not be avoided in spite of his best efforts. He then prayed to God in these words: "O God! Forgive us and also forgive these persons who were our brethren, although they had been unjust to us".

Then he performed funeral prayers for the dead of both sides. As regards Ayesha he sent her back to her house in Madina in a very honourable way.

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