

# Reflections

## THE TRAGEDY OF KARBALA

The first day of the Islamic Calendar Year is the 1st of Muharram. This for a Muslim is the New Year's Day. The 10th of Muharram is the day when Sayyiduna Husain (Radiyahallahu Anhu) and other great Sahabas (Companions of Prophet Muhammad - Sallallahu Alayhi Wasallam) were martyred in the Battle of Karbala, a village near the city of Baghdad in Iraq.

Towards the end of the Prophet's (SAW) Islamic Revolution, the next twenty years which included the reigns of Omar (RA) and Uthman (RA), the second and third Caliph of Islam, many more countries were conquered under the banner of Islam and the Muslim empire extended over a vast expanse of the globe, comprising Iraq, Syria, Iran on one side and a large part of North Africa including Egypt and Morocco on the other. But the historical process has its immutable laws. Just as the Islamic Revolution of the Prophet (SAW) was challenged by the reactionary movements on the Arabian land, the same happened with the conquests of those two Caliphs. The first target of these reactionaries was the person of Caliph Umar (RA) who was assassinated by Abu Luloo Feroze, a Parsi slave from Iran. It was purely an Iranian plot hatched by Hurmuzan, an Iranian general, who thought that if Caliph Umar (RA) was removed from the scene, the empire of Islam would fall like a pack of cards. But by the grace of Allah (SWT), it survived the calamity.

Abdullah Ibn Saba, a Jew from Yemen, under the garb of a Muslim and a great hypocrite (Munaafiq), took his sojourn at Madinah. He had all the characteristics of an expert plotter and the Jewish genius at conspiracies, an attribute of his clan. He planted rebellious ideas among the people. He pleaded for the usurped rights of the house of the Prophet (SAW), carried out a propaganda campaign against Caliph Uthman (RA) and incited the people to revolt. He declared Ali (RA) to be the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and labelled Uthman (RA) as a usurper. He told people that every Prophet has a wasee and Ali (RA) is the wasee of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and, therefore, entitled to be the Caliph after the Prophet. He also preached the divinity of Ali (RA), thus striking at Tauheed, the very root of Islam. The Iranians, who had embraced Islam only a few years before, were taken in by this propaganda because they had a long history of kingship and hero-worship. They were familiar with the divine rights of kings, and hero-worship was sunk in their blood.

In the case of Caliph Uthman (RA) the rioters demanded his removal from the authority vested in him. Caliph Uthman (RA) refused to resign on account of any public pressure because he held the view that he cannot resign from an office which he held on behalf of Allah (Khalifatullah). He gave his life but did not agree to abandon his post as a Caliph. According to his views, that was the only way to resolve the deadlock. Thus he preferred the cause of Islam to his life, and he died as a martyr. In this case the truth and justice were on the side of Caliph Uthman (RA), while the rioters had no just cause to stir.

Sayyiduna Hussain (RA) stood for the integrity of the caliphate. His objection was against the transformation of the Caliphate into Monarchy. There was also much force in his objection against the character of Yazid. In this case truth and justice were on the side of Sayyiduna Hussain (RA). Both Uthman and Hussain defended the cause of truth and justice, and both have high rank as the martyrs of Islam.

The consequences of both the tragedies were fatal, but the consequences of the tragedy of the assassination of Caliph Uthman (RA) were more disastrous. The Umayyads - instead of being dislodged - came to be further entrenched in power. The Alids (supporters of Caliph Ali RA) - did not succeed in their

bid to capture power. Even when the Umayyads were overthrown in 750 C.E., power was captured by the Abbasids and not the Alids. The tragedy of Karbala thus did not have any repercussions on Islamic politics.

The tragedy of the assassination of Caliph Uthman (RA) had, on the other hand, immense repercussions on the Islamic politics. With the assassination of Caliph Uthman (RA), the process of the expansion of Islam came to a grinding halt. Caliph Uthman (RA) was assassinated at a time when the Muslims were ready for further advances against the Christian powers in Asia Minor and Europe. Had Caliph Uthman not been assassinated, the Muslims would not have been involved in civil war. The resources that were wasted in civil war could have been used with advantage in winning further conquests against non-Muslims.

It is strange that the memory of the tragedy of Karbala is kept alive by Muharrum celebrations every year, but the memory of the tragedy of the assassination of Uthman is not kept alive in the same way. It should have been given the same importance to the historical importance of the event.

With regard to the Battle of Jamal, from the account of the most authenticated records of this battle – it has been proven how Muslims fell victims to the traps laid by the Sabayees (followers of the Munaafiq Abdullah ibn Saba). After the occupation of Basra, Umm Al-Mu'mineen A'ishah (RAA) received a message from Caliph Ali (RA) for talks and negotiation. It should also be noted that she was never a claimant for the caliphate. Her only demand was that the murderers of Uthman (RA) must be punished immediately. Caliph Ali (RA) offered to accept her demand if his hands were first strengthened by a declaration of allegiance to him by her group. Both the armies of Sayyidah A'ishah (RA) and Caliph Ali (RA) were facing each other and camping on the battle field when these negotiations started. The news of this negotiation reached Abdullah Ibn Saba and Malik Ibn Ashter Nakhey. They immediately pursued their nefarious plot to undermine the peace talks. Accordingly, under the cover of darkness, they, along with some of their followers, mounted an attack on Umm Al-Mu'mineen A'ishah's (RA) camp and the rumor was spread that the attack was made by the forces loyal to Caliph Ali (RA). At the same time, they sent the word to Caliph Ali's (RA) camp that Umm Al-Mu'mineen A'ishah's (RA) forces had initiated the attack. Consequently the opposing armies clashed with each other with all their might, leaving thousands dead on the battle field.

It would be worthwhile to mention here the instance God-fearing conduct of Caliph Ali (RA). When Ali (RAA) defeated Umm Al-Mu'mineen A'ishah (RA) at the battle of Jamal, he treated her with the same reverence and decorum to which she was entitled as one of the "Mothers of the Believers." He conducted her and her group of ladies and gentlemen with all the respect and security to Madinah. This amply demonstrates that there was no personal enmity or malice between the two.

Undoubtedly, the tragic event of Karbala and the Shahaadah (martyrdom) of Sayyiduna Husain (RA) forms a very important part of Islamic History. Let us not take this to be a mere story of the grandson of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wasallam) and the beloved son of Caliph Ali (RA) and Sayyidah Fatimah (RA). This tragic event illustrates true Islamic leadership and a living example of a sincere attempt to safeguard the ideology of Islam. The life of Sayyiduna Husain (RA) should infuse in us a fervent desire for sacrifice, illuminating our lives with the shining light of Truth and Justice to establish the Islamic Khilaafah.

If one dispassionately studies the events that led to the assassination of Caliph Uthman (RA) and the events ending up in the tragedy of Karbala, we find much therein which provides food for thought and reflection. The revolts in both the cases were basically anti-Umayyad. In the revolt against Caliph Uthman (RA), the main point of agitation against him was that he had appointed the Umayyads to high offices in his government. In the case of the Karbala tragedy, the standpoint of Sayyiduna Husain (RA) was that the Umayyads had converted the caliphate into hereditary monarchy, and that Yazid - in addition to the view of his notorious character - was not fit to be the Caliph.

Let us look at some historical facts that led to Yazid's nomination as successor to his father Mu'aawiyah (RA). From various reliable and trustworthy books of Islamic History, the following facts emerge:

1. Mugheerah bin Shu'bah (RA) wanted to make khilaafah (caliphate) permanent in the Umayyad (Bani Umayyah) dynasty.

2. Mugheerah bin Shu'bah (RA) suggested this to Yazid who, in turn, discussed it with his father Mu'aawiyah (RA), who seconded Mugheerah's suggestion.

*NOTE: Mugheerah argued that on the death of Mu'aawiyah (RA), the issue of his succession, if remained uncertain, might plunge the Ummah once again into a war as had happened in the pre- Mu'aawiyah period; hence it was advisable to nominate a person to wield authority in the event of Mu'aawiyah's death. He also suggested the name of Mu'aawiyah's son Yazeed for the job. Now it is open to question whether this decision was justified or not, but no slanders should be cast on Mu'aawiyah (RA) or Mugheera (RA) who arrived at the conclusion with a clear conscience and in good faith. Both occupy revered positions in the order of merit of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW). Mugheerah bin Shu'bah (RA) was one of those who swore allegiance to the Prophet (SAW) under the tree (on the occasion of Bai'ah Al-Ridwan) and Allah (SWT) has commended all of them who took part in that Bay'ah (Al-Qur'an: Surah Al-Fath: Chapter 48: Verse 18). The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "Beware of expressing opinions about my Companions and, after I am gone, do not use them for your own ends; for whosoever will love them would do so because of their love for me and whosoever would have hatred for them, would do so because of their hatred for me."*

3. Mu'aawiyah (RA) then queried as to who would sponsor the mission. Mugheerah then replied that

- he (Mugheerah) would encourage the people of Kufa
- Ibn Ziad would encourage the people of Basra
- Marwan bin Hakam would mobilize public opinion in Madinah Munawwarah

NB. At that time, Kufa & Basra were main political centres. Madinah Munawwarah, was the centre of all learned men and very religious-minded people.

4. The public opinion in Kufa & Basra was easily organized in favour of Yazid as a successor to Mu'aawiyah (RA). However, the situation in Madinah was more complicated as there were very many great personalities who were eligible to become the next khalifah (Caliph). Mu'aawiyah (RA) therefore, very tactfully, asked Marwan bin Hakam (RA) to canvass the idea for Mu'aawiyah to nominate his successor during his lifetime (without mentioning the name of Yazid). Since the proposal, in its general nature, appeared free from errors, it was accepted by all people.

5. Mu'aawiyah (RA) became encouraged with the agreement of the people of Madinah. He then nominated his son Yazid as his successor.

6. Marwan bin Hakam (RA) then announced the nomination of Yazid in Madinah Munawwarah, which was met with severe opposition as Khilaafah (Caliphate) was now being replaced by Monarchy.

7. Marwan bin Hakam (RA) communicated the details of the opposition in Madinah to Mu'aawiyah.

8. Deputations from Madinah (headed by Muhammad bin Amr bin Hazm) and Basra (headed by Ahnaaf bin Qais) reached Mu'aawiyah's head-quarters in Syria. Mu'aawiyah (RA) had lengthy talks with the head of the Madinah delegation first followed by the head of the Basra delegation. Both these delegations expressed great opposition to Mu'aawiyah's nomination of Yazid.

9. Despite great opposition, Mu'aawiyah (RA) was adamant in insisting on the nomination of Yazid as his successor. He won over some of the people with favour and politeness and some with threat and intimidation. As a result, the people of Iraq and Syria took the oath of allegiance (i.e. made bay'ah). However, Madinah Munawwarah was still their main obstacle.

10. Mu'aawiyah (RA) then went to Madinah Munawwarah, anticipating great opposition from the people there, specifically from FIVE prominent Sahabas, viz:

- **Abdullah bin Zubair** (Radiyahallahu anhu)
- **Abdullah bin Abbas** (Radiyahallahu anhu)
- **Abdullah bin Umar** (Radiyahallahu anhu)

- **Abdur Rahman bin Abu Bakr** (Radiyahallahu anhu)
- **Husain bin Ali** (Radiyahallahu anhu)

Hazrath Abdullah bin Zubair (RA) was selected to represent this group. He opposed Mu'aawiyah (RA) in the following words:

'We have THREE precedents in electing a Khalifah (Caliph):

- a) Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alayhi Wasallam) did not nominate any one as his successor. He left the selection of his successor to the free discretion of the people.
- b) Caliph Abu Bakr (Radiyahallahu anhu) nominated the best person from amongst Rasoolullah's companions (Sahabas) with whom he had no family relationships.
- c) Caliph Umar (Radiyahallahu anhu) left the selection of one of the persons mentioned in the panel of SIX to the Advisory Council. Besides these, no fourth precedent is acceptable."

11. Mu'aawiyah (RA) then held out a threat that if they insist on opposing his nomination, he would resort to force.

12. Mu'aawiyah (RA) draws up a will (wasiyyah) for Yazid during his death illness. In this will, he warned his son Yazid of the impending dangers, specifically mentioning the FIVE great Sahabas mentioned above. He also ordered Yazid to spare Sayyiduna Husain (RA) when subdued as he was closely related to the Prophet (SAW) and was - in reality - entitled for the Khilaafah.

13. Immediately after the death of Mu'aawiyah, his son Yazid sent out emissaries to Madinah Munawwarah demanding clear allegiance from Sayyiduna Husain (RA), his relatives and the remaining FOUR opposing Sahabas mentioned above. It was not surprising that all of them refused. Many temptations were offered and many threats were held out to them but to no avail.

14. This persistent refusal was so disturbing to Yazid that he resorted to force which was his only alternative. This resulted in the Battle of Karbala in which Sayyiduna Husain (RA) and his family and many other Sahabas were mercilessly martyred. To Allah we belong and to Him is our return. Allah, the Most High, says:

**And call not those who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are alive, but you cannot perceive it.** (Surah Al-Baqarah :154)

**Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision and sustenance.** (Surah Ali-Imraan :169)

This was the brief history of the fake process which was adopted to bring Yazid to power. The reasons for refusing to accept Yazid as successor to his father Mu'aawiyah (RA) can be summed up in the words of Sayyiduna Husain (RA) himself. They are as follows:

*"Listen, O People! The Messenger of Allah (SAW) has said: "He who sees a ruler perpetrate acts of tyranny and transgress the limits prescribed by Allah, and establish the rule of tyranny and oppression, and yet does nothing to thwart him either by word or deed, shall not be blessed by Allah with a happy abode in the life Hereafter.*

*Behold, these people have become disciples of Satan. They have rebelled against the Beneficent. Evil holds sway. Divine Laws are spurned. The booty of war is held in illegal possession. That which has been declared unlawful (haraam) by Allah is now looked upon as lawful (halaal) and vice versa. My prime duty now is to restore Truth and Justice. You are already a witness to conditions as they prevail. The world has deviated from the rightful path and turned away from virtue. What remains is a mere resemblance of good. It is a dishonourable life. Terror has engulfed the world. The time has come for the believer to take the road leading to Eternity with the banner of truth aloft. I seek martyrdom (Shahaadah), for living amongst tyrants is in itself a sin and a crime".*

From the assassination of Caliph Uthman (RA) right up to the tragic event at Karbala, one can easily discern the hidden hand of Sabayee agents who successfully plotted against the solidarity of the Muslim Empire

and plunged in into senseless bloodshed. The entire blame must be placed on them, where it rightfully belongs, and the fair names of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) must be cleared from the defamation and dishonor to which they have been exposed through the malicious propaganda of the Sabayees (followers of the Munaafiq Abdullah ibn Saba). Allah (SWT) says: **“That was a community that has passed on. Theirs is what they earned, and yours is what you earn. And you will not be asked about what they did.”** (Chapter 2: Verse 141)

The battle of Karbala was an act on the part of a small number of people whose only weapon was its conviction to be morally right. This same conviction must become the mainspring of Muslim inspiration today when they face opposition and threat from enemies who are manifestly better equipped materially. Contrary to the view of some westernised Muslims today, the most important factor in all conflicts must be the question of right and wrong. Muslims must learn to recognize virtue when it manifests itself and must stand by it with steadfastness. What was the real object of Sayyiduna Husain’s martyrdom? Did he affirm his claim for succession to Khilaafah (Caliphate)? Did he stake his and his family's lives to vindicate this claim? With the high moral standard of Sayyiduna Husain’s household, one cannot harbour this vile belief that the members of such a sacred family could have caused bloodshed among the Muslims for gaining political power for themselves. The FIFTY YEARS of Islamic History, from the Caliphates of Abu Bakr (RA) to Mu’aawiyah (RA), bears testimony that waging war and causing bloodshed merely to seize power had never been the motive of the Banu Haashim family. One therefore has to admit that Sayyiduna Husain (RA) discerned symptoms of decay and corruption in the changing system of the Islamic State. As a result, he felt compelled to resist these evil forces. He even deemed it his duty to wage war in this connection.

The most valuable lesson that can be learnt from this tragic event of Karbala is perseverance and determination in the cause of Truth and Jihaad. Allah, the Most High, will test the believers by bringing them under the throes of various ordeals, as He says:

**And surely, We shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to the patient. Those who, when a misfortune strikes them, say: Verily we belong to Allah and unto Him is our return.** (Surah Al-Baqarah :155-156)

May Allah, the Most High, guide us all to follow the examples of those great Shuhadaa (martyrs) who gave their lives for the preservation of Truth and Justice as outlined by Allah and His beloved Messenger Muhammad. Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, his family, all martyrs in Islam and all his companions. Ameen.

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