

Chapter 13

Historians say that being tired of Abu Dharr's cry of truthfulness Uthman subjected him to every kind of repression in Medina. It was his order that no one should talk to him and none should sit with him. He was forced to keep his mouth shut, but his truthful cries also persisted. When he gave a speech in the masjid of the Prophet his words reached the ears of the people. As he spoke on matters which were enjoined by Allah and His Prophet his speech moved the hearts of the common people. People grew disgusted with the wrongdoings and anti-Islamic activities of Uthman. Therefore he deemed it politically expedient to turn him out of the city. With this end in view he decided to send him to Syria. Uthman perhaps thought that as Mu'awiyah was the Governor of Syria and also the most cunning man, Abu Dharr could be completely paralysed there. Accordingly Uthman forced Abu Dharr to leave for Syria.

Abu Dharr left his hearth and home with his family and reached Syria. His arrival in Syria confirmed the prediction of the Prophet, which the latter had once made to Abu Dharr in the course of their conversation. According to the exhortation of the Prophet he showed patience and accepted his exile silently 1.

Abu Dharr was already tired of and disgusted with the anti-Islamic ways of Uthman, but when he reached Syria and saw the behaviour of Mu'awiyah which was ruining Islam he was extremely astonished and said to himself that the entire administrative set-up was out of order. He was compelled to think on account of the style of life of Mu'awiyah that Islam as presented by the Prophet was not only becoming weak but extinct. In view of these things his natural emotions were excited. Sincerity and frankness impelled him to raise a cry of truth. As he was extremely brave, he never hesitated to tell the truth. So, without thinking that Mu'awiyah was the king of the day, he began to perform his Islamic duties and opened his mouth to prevent Mu'awiyah from doing anti-religious deeds, and told him clearly that his modus operandi was as anti-Islamic as that of Uthman bin 'Affan. Allamah Subaiti writes that Uthman's exiling Abu Dharr from Medina to Syria is a positive proof of the fact that Uthman diverted the critical attitude of Abu Dharr from himself to Mu'awiyah. (Abu Dharr al-Ghifari)

The historian Balazari, Allamah Majlisi, Allamah Subaiti and Allamah Amini write that when Abu Dharr reached Syria, Mu'awiyah was getting his palace "al-Khizra" constructed. Thousands of labourers were working there. One day Mu'awiyah was looking at it with pride. Abu Dharr saw him, went near him, and said, "O Mu'awiyah! If this palace is being built with the Public Treasury, it is a breach of trust and if it is done with your money it is extravagance".

Hearing this Mu'awiyah kept quiet, turned his face from his side and made no answer. Abu Dharr went away and reached the masjid. He took his seat there. Some people complained to Abu Dharr against Mu'awiyah saying that they got nothing out of the gifts although a year had passed. Abu Dharr inclined his head forward and then he stood up. People looked at him. He said: "By Allah, such innovations have gained currency these days as are not to be found in the Holy Qur'an or the Hadith. By Allah, I see that the truth is being effaced and untruth is becoming stronger. Truthful people are being falsified and the sinners are being given preference over the virtuous".

"O aristocrats! O Mu'awiyah and his governors! Sympathize with the poor. Let those who amass gold and silver and do not spend in the way of Allah, know that their foreheads, sides, and backs will be branded with fire. O the hoarders of wealth! Don't you know that when a man dies everything separates from him. Only three things remain for him, lasting charity, useful knowledge, and a virtuous son, who prays for him".

People heard his lecture, the oppressed poor gathered round him and the rich began to fear him. When Habib bin Muslimah Fahri saw a crowd of people near Abu Dharr, he said, "It is a great nuisance". He immediately went to Mu'awiyah and said to him, "O Mu'awiyah! Abu Dharr will totally upset the Syrian administration. If you need Syrians you should nip this nuisance in the bud".

Mu'awiyah thought to himself. "Should I deal with him strictly or leniently? The fire will flare up further by strictness. Should I complain to Uthman? But, what will Uthman say? He will say that I could not improve even one man out of my subjects. Hence, it is better to turn him out of Syria".

It has been a common practice to suppress with an iron hand the truthful statements of the godly people on account of their bitterness. How could the worldly people remain silent after hearing the speeches of Abu Dharr whose religious fervour had become quite natural with him, and then how could a person like Mu'awiyah, who considered the biggest personality lower to him in his vanity of power and cunningness, act upon the advice of Abu Dharr and how could he tolerate his bitter remarks? Abu Dharr in exhorting tone used to recite the Qur'anic verse "*Give them the sad tidings of the severest punishment to those, who amass gold and silver and do not give them in charity*", and it was usual with him that he used to recite this verse against Mu'awiyah in most of the streets, and on the roads of Syria. When he recited it the poor and the needy surrounded him and often they complained to him of the pleasure-seeking of the rich governors and of their own poverty. Mu'awiyah used to get the information of his preaching activities

regularly. At last he imposed severe restrictions upon him and inflicted tortures on him from all sides. When even this much did not work he threatened Abu Dharr with death.

When Abu Dharr heard the threat of death he said, "The dynasty of Umayyah threatens me with poverty and death. I wish to tell them that poverty is more desirable to me than richness, and I like to be under the ground rather than to be above it. I am neither cowed down by the threatening of death, nor by death itself".

Allamah Majlisi writes on the authority of Shaykh Mufid what the Syrians said about the great sermons of Abu Dharr: "When Uthman exiled Abu Dharr from Medina and sent him to Syria, he took his residence in our midst, and started a series of speeches, which stirred us quite a lot. He used to begin his speech with the praise of Allah and the Prophet and then said:

"Love for the progeny of the Prophet is obligatory on all. One who is without love for them will not even smell the fragrance of Heaven". He then added, "O people! Listen to me. I used to honour my covenants before acknowledging Islam, during the days of ignorance, before the revelations of the Qur'an and before the appointment of the Prophet. I told the truth, treated my neighbours with sympathy, considered hospitality my duty, was generous to the poor, and let them share my riches with me. When, afterwards, Allah revealed His Book and appointed His Prophet, I inquired about the matters and came to know that the same manners and customs which were ours were also contained in the exhortations of the Prophet. O people! It is most befitting for the Muslims to adopt good morals. It is true that the Muslims acted according to the precepts of Islam, but, my friends! The behaviour of the Muslims was good for a short time. Then it so happened that the tyrants showed such evil deeds as we had not seen before. These people destroyed the traditions of the Prophet, introduced innovations, and contradicted the person who told the truth, joined a group of wicked people and forsook them who were pious and worthy".

"O Allah! Take my soul if You have for me better things with You than those which are in this world, before I distort your faith or change the tradition of Your Prophet".

He further said, "O people! Be attached to the worship of Allah and desist from sins". Then he described the merits of Ahlul Bayt which he had heard from the Prophet and advised people to stick with the Ahlul Bayt.

The Syrians say that they listened to his speeches intently and a great crowd of people gathered round him when he delivered a sermon, till Mu'awiyah informed Uthman of these happenings, consequently he called Abu Dharr to Medina.

As Abu Dharr had greatly vexed Mu'awiyah through his religious lectures, he, in order to silence him somehow, took courage to send him a bag of money because he could not think of any other means to

do it.

Scholars and historians say that Mu'awiyah in order to silence Abu Dharr despatched a bag of three hundred gold dinars to him through his special envoy. Seeing this he said, "Tell Mu'awiyah that I need no money from him and returned the bag.²

Abu Dharr had seen with his own eyes after the death of the Prophet all those tragic events which Aale Muhammad (the Progeny of the Prophet) were forced to face. He spoke candidly against the hoarding of riches, as he had completely understood the aim of the Public Treasury and the objective of the Holy Qur'an, had seen the mode of action of the Prophet and was observing the way of life of Aale Muhammad. When he found the behaviour and way of life of those responsible for Caliphate just in contrast with these traditions he felt extremely perturbed due to his firm faith. He had never imagined what he saw with his own eyes. As soon as Uthman took up the reins of the government and Caliphate in his hands, he forced his emotions from his heart to his lips and he was compelled to spell out what he kept hidden in his heart for a long time. He saw that riches had multiplied beyond imagination, nepotism and favours to kinsmen had reached their highest limits, the wealth of Public Treasury was being distributed to relatives, friends and supporters instead of the deserving people, without any consideration, and because of this wealth those innovations which were shaking the foundations of Islam, were growing unchecked. So, in accordance with that covenant of truthfulness which he had made with the Prophet, he began to object to, and criticize, those who were responsible for it, in consequence of which he was sent from Medina to Syria. There he saw such anti-Islamic pleasure-seeking innovations which surpassed even the luxurious way of life of Caesar and Khusroe. As he was compelled by the command of the Prophet, and the promise made to him, and also by his religious fervour, he started his preachings there also. He began to give lectures in Syria under the head of the same Qur'anic verse which used to be the theme of his sermon at Medina. In this connection he made many speeches some of which have already been mentioned above.

The caption of his sermon in the denunciation of the amassing of wealth was the verse: *"O Prophet! convey the news of painful punishment, to those who hoard gold and silver but do not spend them in the way of Allah, and tell them that a day will come when their money will be heated in the fire of Hell and with it their forehead, sides and back will be branded and they will be told; This is what you had stored for yourself and now taste what you had hoarded"*. (Surah Taubah, 9:34)

Scholars and historians narrate that while addressing a crowd, in Syria, he said, "By Allah! I behold that truth is perishing, falsehood is being enlivened, truthful people are being contradicted and people are adopting selfishness instead of piety"³.

He further said, "Gold and silver will turn into flames and will encircle those who keep them sealed until they spend them in the way of Allah". Stressing this point he said: "Slates heated in the fire of Hell will be

placed upon the chests of those who collect gold and silver, till they pierce through their ribs and shoulder blades", (Sahih Bukhari, Kitab az-Zakat)

Abdul Hamid, the Egyptian author, writes that later when Abu Dharr reached the masjid people gathered round him, and he said to them:

"Spend whatever Allah has given to you. See that the wordly life does not deceive you. Fix a portion of your possessions as a right of the destitutes. The Prophet has said that lust for abundance has made you sink into oblivion".

"The son of Adam says: My possessions, my possessions! But your possession is that which you have eaten away, worn away; or you have given it away in charity, which means that you have deposited it. Allah has forbidden to hoard wealth. The Prophet has said, "Woe be to; woe be to gold and silver". The booty is the right of the Muslims, but Mu'awiyah stores it to spend on his servants and guards and on his pomp and show. Mu'awiyah has forgotten that only two robes are allowable to him from the Public Treasury, one for winter and the other for summer. Furthermore, he can take the expenses for Hajj and Umrah and also a subsistence allowance for himself and his family only as much as a middle-class Qurayshi can take. Booty must be distributed among all the poor Muslims. But alas! Now lands are being acquired, and houses are being built, and thousands of dinars are being spent on their decoration, and the poor Muslims are being neglected".

A man whispered in his ear, "Beware! What are you saying about Mu'awiyah? Don't you fear him?"

Abu Dharr addressed him and said: "My friend had advised me to tell the truth, even if it is very bitter, and not to care for the reproach of a reproacher, while I am on the right path. I pray to Allah to give me shelter from cowardice, miserliness, and chastisement". Then he added, "People have begun to prepare different kinds of dishes, and they take medicines to digest them. Our Prophet did not eat two dishes at a time on any day till the time of his death. When he ate date palms he did not eat bread. The progeny of the Holy Prophet never ate even the barley bread to their fill for three consecutive days till the time of their death. In the house of the Prophet, it so happened sometimes that neither fire was lighted, nor was neither bread nor other food cooked continuously for a month".

Man asked, "How could he remain alive then?" Abu Dharr answered: "The Holy Prophet ate date palms and drank water. He has said that nobody filled a worse vessel than his belly. Only a few morsels are enough for a man to keep himself alive. If it is so necessary to eat, keep one-third of the belly reserved for food, one-third for water and the remaining one-third for the air. The Prophet has advised us to desist from over-doing because it creates idleness, spoils the body and involves one in a disease. Be moderate in your diet because it saves you from extravagance, strengthens the body and helps in worship. The Prophet never gathered or stored anything. On the contrary, he used to give away in charity whatever he got, so that nothing was left over for his eating. Not to say of Public Treasury the

Prophet used to give away even his own rightful share in the way of Allah".

The aristocrats appealed to Mu'awiyah and complained to him against the propaganda of Abu Dharr. Mu'awiyah sent for him and made a firm resolve to uproot this menace which had shaken the very foundations of his government and had frustrated his hopes.

Abu Dharr entered the court of Mu'awiyah with his lean and thin body. Signs of determination and steadfastness were manifest on his tawny round face. Mu'awiyah stood up to welcome him and offered him a seat by his side. Then he called the servants and ordered them to bring food. The dining cloth was spread and different delicious dishes, which sharpened the appetite, were served.

Mu'awiyah said to Abu Dharr, "Yes, please!" Abu Dharr refused and said, "I eat two kilograms of wheat every week. This has been my practice since the days of the Holy Prophet. By Allah I will not do anything beyond that until I join him". Then turning to Mu'awiyah he said, "You have changed your way. The food which is being prepared for you at the moment is not like the one, which was prepared before. You get the bread cooked of fine flour, have several dishes on one dining-cloth, and put on one pair of garments in the morning and another in the evening. You were not so in the days of the Prophet. Your condition was no better than that of a poor man". (Sahih Muslim, Sunan Nisai and Sunan Baihaqi)

Mu'awiyah: "Abu Dharr! My officials complain against you. They say that you incite the poor against them".

Abu Dharr: "I prevent them from hoarding".

Mu'awiyah: "Why do you do this?"

Abu Dharr: "I do this because Allah has said, *"Warn them of painful torture to those who hoard gold and silver and do not spend it in the way of Allah "*. (Surah Taubah, 9:34)

Mu'awiyah: "O Abu Dharr! I order you to desist from your mischiefs".

Abu Dharr: "O Mu'awiyah! By Allah, I will not stop from it until wealth is distributed among the poor".

Anyway, troubles surrounded Abu Dharr from all sides. Great tortures afflicted him at the hands of Bani Umayyah. Oppressions were let loose on him. But he did not show any weakness and did not refrain from his preaching activities. He now started more serious attacks.

Abdullah Subaiti, Abdul Hamid Misri and Manazir Ahsan Gilani say that Abu Dharr kept on performing the duty of preaching regularly and giving warning of painful chastisement to the hoarders. At last Mu'awiyah began to think of plans to save himself from his biting remarks and, to frustrate his mission. He came to the conclusion, however, that there could be a chance of freedom from the attacks if hoarding is proved with those who speak against it. Therefore, he hit upon a plan, and got convinced that it would surely hit the target.

Ibn Athir, after mentioning the Qur'anic verses, writes that when Abu Dharr could not be silenced in

anyway, Mu'awiyah sent somebody with a thousand dinars to Abu Dharr at night. Abu Dharr took the money and distributed it among the needy before dawn and did not keep even a single coin, for himself.

Mu'awiyah, after the morning prayer, called the man who had taken the gold coins to Abu Dharr; ordered him to go to Abu Dharr and tell him in a feigned anxiety, "O Abu Dharr! Save me from the torture of Mu'awiyah. Mu'awiyah had sent those gold coins to somebody else, and I have delivered them to you by sheer mistake".

The messenger of Mu'awiyah went to him and told him exactly in the same manner what Mu'awiyah had taught him. Abu Dharr said, "O son! Tell Mu'awiyah that the money sent by him was distributed among the needy before the day dawned. I have none of the coins at this moment with me, and if he has a mind to take them back he should give me three days time, during which I will provide them to him from somewhere".

That man repeated the same thing to Mu'awiyah who said, "Undoubtedly Abu Dharr does himself what he asks others to do"⁴

Abdullah Subaiti, after quoting this incident writes in a philosophical passage that Abu Dharr was a personality of a very lofty character. Bani Umayyah showed great short-sightedness in understanding him. That is why they felt the need of such a political swindling. Abdul Hamid Misri writes after this incident: "Mu'awiyah understood that Abu Dharr was true to his words. He spent all the dinars in one night. Mu'awiyah failed to achieve his purpose. He showed leniency to Abu Dharr but to no avail. Then he used violence against him but to no effect. In the end, he wanted to purchase him for three hundred dinars, but could not succeed"⁵.

According to scholars and historians Abu Dharr was still in Syria when Mu'awiyah despatched an army with the permission of Uthman for a naval war (Tarikh Abul Fida). Abu Dharr was busy with his own work. After the conclusion of the war, Mu'awiyah sent for Abu Darda, Umar bin al-Aas, Ubadah bin Samit and Umme Hizam, who were the companions of the Holy Prophet.

When they arrived Mu'awiyah said to them: "I am tired of admonishing Abu Dharr but he does not listen to me. He is harassing me. You have also been honoured with the companionship of the Prophet as Abu Dharr has been. Go to him and ask him to stop his activities and spend the rest of his life quietly and peacefully. I am fed up with him and so are the rich people of the country".

These people readily agreed that they would go to Abu Dharr and would request him as ordered by Mu'awiyah. So they unanimously decided upon a programme and visited him. They said to Abu Dharr. "We have come on behalf of Mu'awiyah. He has sent us to you with the request that you should desist from your preachings and pass your life in peace".

Hearing this Abu Dharr became furious. He thought that those people regarded his preachings absolutely justified and they knew that whatever he was doing was in conformity with the Will of Allah and His Prophet and still they had come to him at Mu'awiyah's behest".

First of all he addressed Ubadah bin Samit and said: "O Abul Walid Ubadah! There is no doubt that you have priority to me in every respect and have superiority over me in every way. You are older in age and have been in the company of the Prophet for a longer period. You are sensible, intelligent, well-versed in religious affairs, and possess a good personality. But I am sorry to say that in spite of knowing everything well you have come to advise me at the instance of Mu'awiyah".

"O Ubadah! Do I not understand things? Have I lost all sense of reasoning? Are you not aware of the circumstances? Is what I say wrong? Are not my exhortations in conformity with the intentions of Allah and His Prophet? O Ubadah! It pained me a great deal that being an intelligent person, you who know everything well, came to advise me. Listen! I have a strong hatred for this whole deputation because a well-informed man like you has come in this deputation".

Then he turned to Abu Darda and said: "O Abu Darda! You have been blessed with little love for the Prophet. It was definite with you that if you had not acknowledged the faith immediately you would have been deprived of the honour of companionship owing to the death of the Prophet. But you acknowledged the faith, were honoured with the companionship, and were regarded as a good companion. But listen! You were not as much benefited by the companionship of the Holy Prophet as I was. You cannot understand his objectives as much as I do. I understand the objectives of the Prophet and do according to the desire of Allah and His Prophet. So you have no right to advise me".

Then he addressed Umar bin' Aas and said in a harsh tone: "O Umar bin' Aas! I recognize you very well. What else have you done other than participating in the battles? Of course, you were honoured with the companionship of the Holy Prophet, but you never got a chance to live with him. You were always away from the Prophet on account of wars. You can neither understand his intentions nor are you capable enough to form a correct opinion about my action and behaviour. I know that you are under the influence of Mu'awiyah at this time. That is why you have come to admonish me thoughtlessly".

Then he turned to Umme Hizam and said: "What should I tell you? You are a woman. There is no doubt that you got the honour of companionship. Still you are a woman, at any rate, and you have the brain of a woman". Then he said: "Go and tell Mu'awiyah to sharpen his wits, to act upon my advice and not to lose his faith on account of the world".

After hearing all these things all of them kept quiet. After a short while they took leave of Abu Dharr and came back to Mu'awiyah. They told him that they had conveyed his message to Abu Dharr. He asked

them as to what they had said and what answer he had given. Ubadah bin Samit repeated the whole event and said in the end, "I never sat in a company where such sharp reproofs had been so frankly administered". (Musnad Ibn Hanbal, Masanid Abu Dharr)

Abu Dharr was busy preaching in Syria, when the time of Hajj arrived. He sought the permission of Uthman and expressed his wish to go out of Syria to pilgrimage and to stay at the shrine of the Holy Prophet for a few days. Uthman sent him the letter of permission from Medina and Abu Dharr went for Hajj. He performed Hajj and he went to Medina. He stayed near the grave of the Prophet for a few days and then came back to Syria. Balazari has also narrated this event in a few sentences.

On his return from Hajj again he restarted his preaching activity. On one side he was using his full force in exhortations and on the other side innumerable applications of the rich people were reaching Mu'awiyah to seal Abu Dharr's lips. The main theme of these applications was that people recited on the roads and streets the verse of the Qur'an in which there is a warning for the moneyed people being branded with the heated gold and silver, thus creating difficulty in their passage to Syria. As a consequence of it Mu'awiyah got it proclaimed that nobody was allowed to be in the company of Abu Dharr or sit with him⁶.

When Abu Dharr got the news of this social boycott he himself began to ask people not to come to him or sit with him. This was because he thought that if somebody came to him he would be subjected to torture by the government. But as he could not help preaching he himself reached the place where some people had gathered and began to perform his duty.

According to Ibn Khaldun when a group of people went to see him after this order of social boycott, Abu Dharr himself asked them to leave and remain away from him.⁷

It appears from Balazari's report that those people who had contacts with Abu Dharr and listened to his speeches were more severely dealt with than Abu Dharr himself.⁸

How courageous Abu Dharr was! He did not tolerate any severity to those who used to visit him, and did not want them to suffer any inconvenience. But so far as his personal sentiments were concerned he insisted on expressing them with full faith and fervour. He never bothered about any gain and loss in the way of Allah.

1. Al-Ghadir Allamah Amini, vol. 8, p. 302

2. Al-Ishtiraki az-Zahid, Tarikh Balazari, al-Ghadir, vol 8, p 293

3. Al-Balazari, vol. 5, p. 56

4. Tarikh Kamil, vol. 3, p. 24, Tafsir Ibn Kathir, part 10, p. 54

5. Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, p. 133

6. Tabaqaat Ibn Sa'd, p. 176

7. Tarikh Ibn Khaldun, p. 2

8. Tarikh Balazari, vol. 5 p. 65

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