

Preface

History is a mirror that reflects the past events and happenings to the inquisitive eyes of the researchers who, years and centuries later, anxiously and eagerly try to scrutinize the past generations in order to recognize among them the forgotten figures, their roles, and their decisive historical impact. It teaches lessons of benevolence, honesty, and righteousness from the good among them and creates a strong dislike for the evil ones so that their footsteps are not followed.

Nevertheless, the mirror of history is not as transparent and exhilarating as it should be; for, instead of illustrating the birth of stars and the sunrise, it has crammed the long and tortuous memory of ages and epochs with bitter recollections, sad views of sunset and horrendous scenes of darkness!

Then, are the historians to be blamed to have witnessed most of the sorrows, battles, killings, wailings, and captivities, overlooking the beautiful blossoms and flowerings; or else, since the historians aspired to record something attractive and unique, to witness a smile, and to profile kind and relaxing moments of history and there were few of them to be found, and such moments were overshadowed by the onslaught of brutalities and oppressions!

In any case, we are now opening another page from the early history of Islam that has perhaps remained hidden from the eyes of majority of Muslims across the world. However, the magnitude of oppression and aggression committed against innocent human beings and brutalities reported in the pages of history against the inhabitants of the holy city of Medina still shakes human conscience, and mournfully bereaves souls and bitterly torments fair-minded people.

The battle of Harrah, which should be rightfully called the “tragedy of Harrah” occurred just 64 years after the migration of the Holy Prophet (s) to Medina and 53 years after his sad demise. It took place in Medina, a city that was named as the city of the Prophet (s) whose people were from the generation of the men and women who fore mostly established the foundations of amity, compassion, benevolence, honesty and great Islamic culture throughout the violently hostile Arab lands, and with their self-sacrifice removed the pagan Arab customs of murder, plunder, and transgression and promoted the divine culture of knowledge and insight, and respect for human dignity.

However, within this short historical period of 64 years, especially after the sad demise of the Prophet of God (s), the Muslim community witnessed certain adverse and unanticipated events which eventually led the Umayyad rule over them. Banu Umayyah (the Umayyids) that was the polytheist tribe, and among the most aggressive ones against the Prophet (s) and the Muslims, took the reign of Caliphate and command of the Muslims' lives, property, and honor just within 40 years of the demise of the Prophet (s).

Yesterday's rebels and polytheists now returned triumphantly and sat on the Prophet's (s) pulpit and proclaimed to be the commanders of the faithful!

Those freed at the conquest of Mecca and those who enjoyed the Prophet's clemency and compassion (known as 'tulaqa'), were resolute to take his *Ummah* as prisoners!

It was thus that after the battle of Harrah “Those among the children and descendents of *Ansār* (Helpers) and *Muhājirin* (Emigrants) who survived this tragedy had to formally admit in front of the commander of the Shāmi (Syrian) army that they were the slaves of Yazīd (the leader of the Umayyid) and that he is allowed to do with them whatever he wished to!”

Achievements of this Research

This research does not intend to call the uprising of the inhabitants of Medina against the oppressive Umayyid rule of Yazid as great socio-religious bravery, although it can neither ignore the existence of religious, humanistic, and reformative motivations in that uprising. However, it can definitely arrive at the conclusion that the trend of Islamic Caliphate transformed into an anti-Islamic and anti-human trend in which Yazīd's hereditary monarchy represented the peak of this deviation.

The foundation of every government, its goals, its treatment of subjects and policies in general and its performance in particular are the most self-evident indicators of its rightfulness, legitimacy, and humanness, and the clearest evidences of its illegitimacy as well.

“Harrah tragedy” is only second to the “great tragedy of Karbalā” and the martyrdom of the descendents of Prophet (s) at the hands of Yazīd's army that was caused by the incompetence and oppressive nature of the Umayyid rule. It evidently showed that if the government of a Muslim society gives up the religious and human standards, how disastrous it can be to the religion and the Muslim *umma*.

We have attempted, in the following pages, to illustrate as much of the Harrah tragedy and issues related to some of its important aspects that have been recorded in history's memory, and to make a critical review and analyze them whenever necessary.

Among other achievements of this research that were not brought up in the main body of the book are briefly listed as follows:

A. Although the tragedy of Karbalā in 61 A.H. (680 C.E.) and the study of its different ideological and

socio-political aftermaths could by itself be a vivid testimony to the brutality of Yazīd's and Umayyid's monarchy and an indication of the social degradation under the illegitimate political administrations of that era, the battle of Harrah that took place two or three years after the event of Karbalā showed that the latter, too, had not been a casual event perpetrated by the Umayyid ruling system.

It showed that the essence of Umayyid monarchy demanded involvement in open onslaughts of murder and pillage of the household of Prophet (s), forcing such great men as Imam Husayn b. 'Alī ('a), who refused to recognize their rule, to pay for his religiosity and noble-spiritedness by his own blood and that of his loved ones.

The Harrah tragedy was in fact confirmatory evidence to the Umayyid's rebellious attitude towards religion of Islam and its humanistic values.

B. In the process of the Madinans' revolt and among various figures who lost their lives, were executed, fled from Medina, or had to swear allegiance to Yazīd out of degradation and humiliation and to call themselves his slaves, there were those who in the earlier years of the formation of deviation in political leadership of the Islamic community refused to take even the smallest steps in the reformation and correction of the deviated politico-religious trends; and when they happened to do so and stand against such perversions, was also a Christian.

Subsequently, those who from the outset merely surrendered to the anti-Islamic trends and viewed religion as a means of power and polity, took up the rule, recruited a powerful and equipped army of newly converted Muslims who were unfamiliar with the basic teachings of the Islam, and by means of forged traditions of the Prophet (s) and ostensibly religious justifications persuaded them to slaughter and plunder the Muslims!

It is truly admonitory that such men as 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar who, according to the historical reports regarded such high status and authenticity for themselves and were so cautious and obsessive during the Caliphate of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib ('a) that they would say, "We should be the last ones to swear allegiance to 'Alī!" Whereas in order to prevent people from opposition to Yazīd and to encourage them to pledge allegiance to him, they proclaimed, "The one who dies without a pledge of allegiance to Yazīd will die similar to the one who dies in a state of ignorance."²²²

Yet, what is more admonitory is that these people who did not pledge allegiance to 'Alī ('a)'s mighty hands, mind, and faith or when they did they did it hesitantly, hastened by night to pledge allegiance to such persons as Hajjāj b. Yūsuf Thaqafī – the historically notorious savage – not by shaking his hand as it was common but by vilely kissing his feet!

C. From whatever aspect that is considered, the tragedy of Karbalā and the massacre and plunder of Madinans are too massive and shameful; but what makes the resonance of those tragedies more painful and agonizing is that the perpetrators of such cruelties have introduced their inhuman actions as based on faith and religious foundations, to the extent that the commanders of Yazīd army in order to spur the

troops to fight would shout at them ”*Yā Khayl Allāh* – O Army of Allah!”³

Or, in the battle of Harrah, Muslim b. 'Uqba – the commander of Syrian army – wishes that before dying he would be able to suppress the revolt of Medina and to terminate Yazīd's opponents in order to have enough spiritual provision in his book of deeds when meeting Allah on the day of Resurrection!

No doubt, such slogans, statements and tactics are more of a devilish and political nature than being rooted in ignorance and misunderstanding of religion. Unfortunately these policies and practices rapidly influenced the hearts and minds of the newly converted naïve Muslims and the weak in faith and knowledge of Islamic teachings at that time.

It is for these reasons that the true scholars and the guardians of ideological boundaries of religion have always been concerned with such misapplications and misunderstanding of religion by the begrudged and spiteful and the feebleminded. In addition, whenever possible, they have tried to represent the humane and rational essence of religion so that no counter human and imprudent movement might be able to disguise its deviated and detrimental face under superficially religious slogans and banners.

Hoping that report of this crucial period of early Islamic history may be a step towards further appreciation of the real nature of the Umayyid's Rule and its background, brutal policies and devilish tactics, its distortion of the Islamic teachings and the grievous aftermaths. It may provide lessons from this painful incident for distinguishing truth from falsehood and also serve as admonitions for avoiding wrong, inhumane, and anti-religious ways and as motivation for moving toward justice, fairness, and righteousness.

Ahmad Turābī

April 2008

1. Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharh-i Nahj al-Balāgha*, vol. 4, p. 11.

2. Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubalā*, vol. 3, p. 325.

3. Al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād*, vol. 2, p. 92.