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The Medina Uprising; a Right or Wrong Movement?

The properness or impropriety of a socio-political movement is examinable from various aspects, and as long as the direction and the viewpoint of judgment are not specified, any judgment will remain in ambiguity.

First, it is to be clarified that whether properness and impropriety is meant to be legitimacy or the lack of it, or whether it is meant to be well-timed, efficacious, or ineffectual.

The Degree of Legitimacy of the Medina Uprising

The legitimacy of a social movement is dependent upon several factors including the motivations, goals, methods, prevailing circumstances, and conditions.

What is obtained from the existing historical sources – and we already mentioned some aspects of it in previous pages – is that the main and explicitly expressed motivation of the pioneers in Medina movement has been a religious, reformist, and human one, as 'Abd Allāh b. Hanzala, the most distinguished figure among the leaders and commanders of the uprising of Medina, would frequently talk about religious values while encouraging the people to revolt and resist, and rejected Yazīd as deserving to rule over Muslims because of his vices, corruption, and incompetence.¹⁹

Medinans' efforts in preventing their properties from being taken to the Umayyid court in Syria could have been rated as a means to express their overall dissatisfaction with the Umayyid's rule, rather than an economic motivation to battle for. As a matter of fact, whispers of dissatisfaction with the Yazīd's Caliphate had begun long before this event; and it was such expressions of discontent and turbulence that forced Yazīd to replace the governors of Medina one after another at very short intervals, so that in 61 A.H. (680 C.E.) first Walīd b. 'Utba was the governor, then 'Amr b. Sa'd took office, and after a very short while 'Uthmān b. Muhammad b. Abī Sufyān, Yazīd's cousin was appointed as Medina's ruler.

All these indicated the incompetence of the Medina's successively appointed governors and the unrest of

the people of that city.

However, fighting tactics of Medinan combatants were not accompanied with crime and betrayal, as they had the power to take hostage the governor of Medina, Marwān b. Hakam, and the Umayyid's proxies and kill them in case of the invasion of Medina by the Syrian army; but they did not do so and let all of them leave Medina on the condition, verbally undertaken, that they would not help the enemy and will not guide the Syrian army into Medina. (This indicated the presence of traitors among the combatants as well as weak planning for the defence of Medina and its inhabitants.)

It is reported in some sources that the people of Medina expelled the Umayyid's cronies and its members and their relatives from Medina and assaulted and battered them. Firstly, these reports are not compatible with the Umayyid's taking an oath next to the Prophet's (s) mausoleum, as taking an oath demanded a peaceful and sociable atmosphere. Secondly, if we accept as true the report of expelling and battering, still it will never be comparable to the slaughter and plunder that normally takes place during such events and in addition its similarity to the Syrian army's cruel treatment of the inhabitants of Medina is impossible and can never be made!

Something that remains to be researched and examined about the legitimacy of Medina revolt is that whether the pioneers of this uprising had taken necessary measures for preserving the Muslims' lives and honor or they left the sanctity of Medina, and the Muslims' lives, properties, and families exposed to the plunders and aggressions by the most malicious people and the most wicked army commanders of the Muslim history!

It seems that this had been Imam Zayn al-'Abidīn's ('a) most important concern. He, perhaps, didn't view the time, circumstances, and the battle style as appropriate and foresaw its horrible outcomes. For this reason, as an Imam and a socio-religious leader, he did not deem advisable for the Muslim community to openly step into this conflict.

But, that's how such men as 'Abd Allāh b. Hanzala and others influential in the Medina uprising had found the situation and circumstances to be, and whether they were guilty of any negligence in their evaluations of the circumstances and the battle style, is something not adequately dealt with in historical sources. We have no reason to scrutinize this issue, as a tradition related from the Holy Prophet (s) says:

“When the Prophet (s) left Medina in one of his journeys, upon reaching “Harrat az-Zahra”¹ he stopped for a while and said: *﴿Indeed we belong to Allah and to Allah do we indeed return.﴾* Hearing this from his holiness at the outset of a trip made people in his company worried. 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, from among those present, asked: O Messenger of Allah (s)! What caused you to say this?

The Prophet (s) replied: 'My *istirjā'* saying *﴿innā li-llāh wa innā ilaihi raji'un﴾* Al-Qur'an, 2: 156 is not because of this trip that we are about to start; rather, it is because the good ones of my *ummah* after my companions will be killed in this stony land.²

The words and slogans of 'Abd Allāh b. Hanzala on one hand however this tradition on the other hand indicates that the pioneers of the Medina revolt and the active combatants had good intentions and right motivations and their move *per se* was not out of vain desires, seeking power, or corruption, for if it were so, the Prophet (s) would not have called them “the good ones of my *ummah*”.

The excellence and honor of those killed in the Medina uprising and their being rewarded by God is unrelated to the fact that Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ('a) as a spiritual figure who had been certain about the uprising as being ineffectual or ill-fated would have felt obliged not to participate in this revolt and practically impart to those who had comprehended his *wilāyat* (divine leadership) what their duty was.

After all, whether the uprising and movement of the Medinans has been regarded as rightful and their killed ones as martyrs, there is an inalienable truth here as to the Yazīd and Syrian army's treatment of the Medinans to be an irreligious and inhumane treatment and that no justification can be accepted for the plunder of the property and violating the chastity of the Muslim women.

Even if the people of Medina had rebelled against a government, they had not rebelled against an Islamic government that the Muslims had voted for or had been legally and religiously legitimized. Rather, they had rebelled against someone who had been notorious for his debauchery, cruelties and injustice and had governed on the back of people by force of spears and threats, who had inherited throne from his father, who in turn had stayed in power over Syria by rising against the central rule and the legal Caliphate of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib ('a) and in fact had rebelled against the elected rule of the Muslim community, launched military campaigns, and gained political stability through deceit and treachery!

It is not surprising that the Umayyids and their cronies, who like hungry and gluttonous camels, had been recklessly devouring the vast possessions and properties of the Muslim world at the expense of the public treasury, would evidently consider any voice of protest and dissidence as rebellion against the Muslims' Caliph and take it as tantamount to apostasy and viewing it as absolutely lawful to shed the dissidents' blood, take away by force or plunder their property, and violate the chastity of their women!

1. Name of a region, a mile away from the Mosque of the Prophet (s), where the Jews of Medina lived (Samhīdī, *Wafī' al-Wafī'*, vol. 1, p. 64). It is possibly the same region from where the Syrian army penetrated into Medina. As Wāqidī has related from Ibn 'Abbās, when the Prophet (s) arrived in the Banī 'Abd al-Ashhal, he pointed to Harrah and uttered the above statement.

2. The phrase “after my companions” may refer to spiritual status of those who were killed in the uprising of Medina, or may point to the fact that they were one generation after prophet's companions.

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