

Chapter 49: The Battle of Hunayn

It was the usual practice with the Prophet that whenever he conquered a region, he personally looked after its political problems and the religious matters of its inhabitants, so long as he stayed there, and as and when he left that place he appointed there suitable persons on different posts. Its reason was that the people of these regions, who were acquainted with the old and wound-up systems, did not possess information about the system which had replaced it.

Islam is a social, moral, political and religious system, its laws emanate from revelation, and acquainting people with these laws and their enforcement amongst them needs distinguished, mature and learned persons, who should teach them correct principles of Islam intelligently and should also enforce Islamic system amongst them.

When the Prophet decided to leave Makkah for the territories of the tribes of Hawazin and Saqif, he appointed Mu'az bin Jabal as a guide to educate and instruct the people and entrusted the government and administration of the city and imamate (leading prayers) in the mosque to 'Atab bin Usayd, who was a capable person. After staying in Makkah for fifteen days the Prophet proceeded to the land of Hawazin tribe.¹

An Unmatched Army

On that day the Prophet had twelve thousand armed soldiers under his standard. Out of them ten thousand were those, who had accompanied him from Madina and had taken part in the conquest of Makkah, and the other two thousand were from amongst Quraysh, who had embraced Islam recently.

The command of this group rested with Abu Sufyan.

In those days such an army was hardly found anywhere and this numerical strength of theirs became the cause of their initial defeat. It was because, contrary to the past, they prided themselves on the large number of their soldiers and ignored the military tactics and principles of war.

When Abu Bakr's eyes fell on the large number of men he said: "We shan't at all be defeated, because

our soldiers far outnumber those of the enemy".² He did not, however, pay attention to this reality that numerical superiority is not the only factor for victory and in fact this factor is of little importance.

The Holy Qur'an itself mentions this fact and says:

Allah has helped you on many occasions including the day of Hunayn. When you were happy with the number of your men who proved to be of no help to you and the whole vast earth seemed to have no place to hide you (from your enemies) and you turned back in retreat (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:25)

Acquisition Of Information

After the conquest of Makkah great excitement and enthusiasm could be seen in the areas inhabited by the tribes of Hawazin and Saqif. Special contacts existed between them. The connecting link between them was a war like person named Malik bin 'Awf Nasri.

The result of their mutual contacts was that before the Islamic army could pay attention to them they themselves came up to encounter it, so that, before the Muslims moved, they themselves should strike them hard by military tactics. They also selected from amongst them a thirty year old brave and courageous man to act as their commander.

Besides the aforesaid two tribes, the tribes of Bani Hilal, Nasr and Jasham also participated in this battle and all of them came up as a single striking force.

As ordered by the chief commander, all those who participated in the battle, stationed their women and retinue, behind the rear of the army. When he was asked about the reason for this decision he said: "These men will remain steadfast in their fighting to protect their women and property and will not at all think of flight or retreat".³

When Durayd bin Sammah, an old man and an experienced warrior, heard the wailings of the women and the children, he quarrelled with Malik, and, considering this act of his to be wrong from the point of view of principles of war, said to him:

"The result of this action will be that if you are defeated you will be surrendering all your women and property to the army of Islam gratuitously". Malik did not pay heed to the words of this experienced soldier and said: "You have grown old and have lost your wisdom and knowledge of military tactics".

However, the later events proved that the old man was right and the presence of women and children in a sphere of operation in which one has to strike and run proved to be of no use, except that the soldiers got involved in difficulties and their activities were hindered.

The Prophet sent Abdullah Aslami incognito to collect information about the equipment, intentions and

itinerary of the enemy. He roamed about in the entire army of the enemy, collected the necessary information and placed it at the disposal of the Prophet. Malik, too, sent three spies towards the Muslims in a special manner so that they might bring the requisite information for him. They, however, returned to Malik with their hearts full of awe and fear.

The commander of the enemy army decided to make amends for the numerical inferiority and weak morale of his soldiers by means of a military trick, i.e. by making a surprise attack, create confusion among the army of Islam so that the discipline of their units might be disrupted and the schemes of their high command might be frustrated.

To achieve this end, he encamped at the end of the pass which led to the region of Hunayn. He then ordered all the soldiers to hide themselves behind the stones, the rocks and gaps of the mountains and at elevated places around the pass, and as soon as the army of Islam arrived in this deep and lengthy pass, all of them should come out of their places of hiding and attack the units of Islam with arrows and stones. Thereafter, a special group should descend from the mountains in an orderly manner and put the Muslims to sword under the cover of their archers.

Equipment Of The Muslims

The Prophet was aware of the strength and the obstinacy of the enemy. Before leaving Makkah, therefore, he called Safwan bin Umayyah and borrowed one hundred coats of mail from him and guaranteed its return. He personally put on two coats of mail, put a helmet on his head, mounted a white mule, which had been presented to him, and moved on behind the army of Islam.

The army of Islam rested at night at the mouth of the pass and the day had not yet dawned fully when the tribe of Bani Salim arrived in the passage of Hunayn under the command of Khalid bin Walid.

When a major part of the army of Islam was still in the pass, a sudden noise of the buzzing of the arrows and roaring of the warriors, who were sitting in ambush behind the rocks, was heard and it created a strange fear and terror among the Muslims. Arrows were being showered upon them and a group of the enemy attacked them under the protection of the archers.

This sudden attack terrified the Muslims so much that they began to flee and created, more than the enemy itself, disorder and disruption among their ranks. These developments were a source of great joy for the hypocrites present in the army of Islam, so much so that Abu Sufyan said: "Muslims will run up to the coast of the sea".

Another hypocrite said: "The magic has been counteracted". A third from amongst them determined to do away with Islam in that confused state of affairs by killing the Prophet and thus destroy the belief of the Oneness of Allah and the Prophethood of Islam lock, stock, and barrel.

The Steadfastness Of The Prophet And Of A Group Of Self-Sacrificing Persons

The Prophet was disturbed immensely by the flight of his friends which was the main cause of all the alarm and disorder, and felt that if matters were allowed to take their own course, even for a moment longer, the pivot of history would be different, humanity would change its course and the forces of polytheism would beat down the army of monotheism. While riding his mule, therefore, he said loudly: "O supporters of Allah and His Prophet! I am the servant of Allah and His Prophet".

He uttered this sentence and then turned his mule towards the battlefield which was occupied by Malik's men, who had already killed some Muslims and were busy killing others. A group of self-sacrificing persons like Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, Abbas, Fadl bin Abbas, Usamah and Abi Sufyan bin Harith, who had not left him alone and unprotected ever since the battle started, also proceeded along with him.⁴

The Prophet asked his uncle Abbas, who had a very loud voice, to call back the Muslims in this manner: "O Ansar, who helped the Prophet! O you who took the oath of allegiance to the Prophet under the tree of Paradise! Where are you going? The Prophet is here!"

The words of Abbas reached the ears of the Muslims and stimulated their religious zeal and fervour. All of them responded immediately by saying, *Labbayk! Labbayk* (Here am I! Here am I!) and returned bravely towards the Prophet.

The repeated call by Abbas, which gave the good tidings of the Prophet's safety, made the fleeing men return to the Prophet with a peculiar regret and remorse and made them reorganize their rows. In compliance with the orders of the Prophet and also to obliterate the shameful stain of desertion, the Muslims launched a general attack and compelled the enemies, in a very short time, to retreat or flee.

In order to encourage the Muslims the Prophet was saying: "I am the Prophet of Allah and never tell a lie and Allah has promised me victory". This war tactics made the warriors of Hawazin and Saqif run away to the region of Autas and Nakhlah and to the forts of Ta'if leaving behind their women and retinue and a number of those killed in the battle.

War Booty

In this battle the casualties of the Muslims were large, but the biographers have not mentioned the number of those killed.

The Muslims, however, stood to gain and the enemies fled leaving behind six thousand captives, twenty four thousand camels, forty thousand sheep and four thousand Waqih⁵ of silver. The Prophet ordered that all the men and the entire property should be taken to Ji'ranah. He also appointed some men to

keep a watch. The captives were kept in a particular house and the Prophet ordered that the entire booty should remain there as it was, till he returned from Ta'if.

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1. Tabaqat-i Kubra, vol. II, page 137.
 2. Tabaqat-i Kubra, vol. II, page 150.
 3. Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, page 897.
 4. In Mughazi, vol. III, page 602, Waqidi has mentioned some feats of valour of the Commander of the Faithful at that critical juncture.
 5. It is equal to 213 grams approximately.

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