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Was Ibn Saba the Organizer of the Revolt Against 'Uthman in Basra, Kufa, and Egypt?

Should a reader of Islamic history be liberated from his emotions towards or against the Third Caliph, he can be assured that the call for a revolt against the Caliph did not start in Basra, Kufa, Syria, or Egypt.

The agitation against the Caliph started in Medina by prominent and influential individuals. The most prominent among them were 'A'ishah, the mother of believers, Talhah, Zubayr, Abdul Rahman Ibn Awf, Amr Ibn Al-'As, and Ammar Ibn Yasir.

The Third Caliph, 'Uthman, was given the allegiance of the people with the stipulation that he would manage the affairs of the nation according to the Book of God and the teachings of the Prophet. He was to follow the method of Abu Bakr and 'Umar, if there was no instruction from the Qur'an or the Prophet.

It is well-known that the first two caliphs lived very simple lives. They did not give members of their clans a preference over other people, nor did they appoint any of their relatives to prominent positions in the State.

'Uthman, on the other hand, had his own opinions. He allowed himself to live luxuriously. He put members of his clan in prominent and strong positions in the State, preferring them over other Muslims. However, his relatives were not righteous. 'Uthman thought that his preference towards them was in accordance with the Book of God because the Qur'an urges people to be kind to their relatives. This method of handling the affairs of the State did not please many companions. They found it extravagant and extreme.

They criticized the Caliph for the following things:

(1). He brought his uncle Al-Hakam Ibn Al-'As, (son of Umayyah, son of Abd Shams), to Medina after the Prophet had exiled him from Medina.

It was reported that Al-Hakam used to hide and listen to the words of the Prophet as he spoke secretly

to prominent companions and circulated what he heard. He used to imitate and ridicule the Prophet in the way he walked. The Prophet one time looked at him while he was being imitated and said: "This way you will be." Al-Hakam started immediately shaking and continued that way until he died.

One day, while sitting with some of his companions, the Messenger of God said, "A cursed man will enter the room." Shortly thereafter, Al-Hakam entered. He was the cursed man. (Yusuf Ibn Abd Al-Barr, *Al-Isti'ab*, part one, pages 359–360)

(2). After bringing him to Medina, 'Uthman gave his uncle Al-Hakam 300,000 dirhams.

(3). He made Marwan, son of Al-Hakam, his highest assistant and top advisor, giving him influence equal to his own. Marwan bought a fifth of the spoils of North Africa for 500,000 dinars. However, he did not pay this amount. The Caliph allowed him to keep the money. This amount was equal to ten million dollars.

(4). The Caliph appointed his foster brother Abdullah Ibn Sa'd governor of Egypt. At that time, Egypt was the largest province in the Muslim State.

Ibn Sa'd had declared his Islam and moved from Mecca to Medina. The Prophet enlisted him as a recorder of the revelation. However, Ibn Sa'd then deserted the faith and returned to Mecca. He used to say: "I shall reveal equal to what God revealed to Muhammad."

When Mecca was conquered, the Prophet ordered the Muslims to kill Ibn Sa'd. He was to be killed even if he was found tying himself to the cloth of the Ka'bah. Ibn Sa'd hid himself at the house of 'Uthman. When the situation calmed down, 'Uthman brought Ibn Sa'd to the Prophet and informed him that he had put Ibn Sa'd under his protection. The Prophet remained silent for a long while, hoping that one of those present would kill Ibn Sa'd before he honored 'Uthman's request. The companions, however, did not understand what the Prophet meant by his long silence. Since no one moved to kill Ibn Sa'd, the Prophet approved the protection of 'Uthman.

(5). The Caliph 'Uthman appointed Al-Walid Ibn 'Uqbah (one of his Umayyad relatives), governor of Kufa after dismissing the previous governor, the famous companion Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas. Sa'd was a famous marksman known for combating enemies of Islam in front of the Prophet at the Battle of Uhud. The Prophet prayed for him saying:

"Lord, I ask Thee to make his arrow accurate as I ask Thee to respond to his prayer."

Walid's past during the time of the Prophet was not honorable. The Qur'an discredited him and called him a transgressor. For instance, the Messenger sent him to Banu Al-Mustalaq to collect their Zakat. Walid witnessed from a distance the Mustalaqites coming toward him on their horses. He became frightened due to a previous hostility between the Mustalaqites and him. He returned to the Messenger of God and informed him that the Mustalaqites wanted to kill him. This was not true. However, Walid's

information infuriated the Medinite Muslims, and they wanted to attack the Mustalaqites. At this time, the following revelation came down:

"Oh you believe, if a transgressor comes to you with news, try to verify it, lest you inflict damage on people unwittingly; then you may consequently regret your hasty action. (49:6)

Walid continued in his non-Islamic way for the rest of his life. He used to drink wine and several witnesses testified to the Caliph that they had witnessed Walid drunk while leading a congregational prayer. Upon the testimony of good witnesses, Walid was lashed eighty times and was dismissed by the Caliph. The Caliph was expected to replace this transgressor with a good companion of the Prophet but, instead, he replaced Walid with Sa'id Ibn Al-'As, one of his Umayyad relatives.

The Companions Of Medina Wrote To The Companions Outside Medina

Al-Tabari reported that when people witnessed what 'Uthman had done, the companions living in Medina wrote to the companions living in other provinces:

"You have left Medina to endeavor in the way of God and promote the religion of Muhammad. The religion of Muhammad has been corrupted. Come back and straighten the religion of Muhammad."

The companions came from every province and killed the Caliph. (Al-Tabari, *al-Ta'rikh*, part 4, page 367)

Talhah

Talhah Ibn Ubaydullah was one of the biggest agitators against 'Uthman. It is reported that Imam Ali said to Talhah:

"I ask you in the name of Allah to deter people from attacking 'Uthman."

Talhah retorted: "No, by God, until the Umayyad returns to the people their rights." 'Uthman was the head of the Umayyads. (Al-Tabari, page 405)

'Uthman was besieged in Medina while Imam Ali was in Khaybar. The Imam came to Medina and found people gathering at the residence of Talhah, one of the influential people in Medina. 'Uthman came to Imam Ali and said:

"You owe me my Islamic right and the right of brotherhood and relationship. If I have none of these rights and if I were in the pre-Islamic era, it would still be a shame for a descendant of Abd-Manaf (of whom both Ali and 'Uthman are descendants) to let a man of Taym (Talhah) rob us of our authority." Imam Ali said to 'Uthman: "You shall be informed of what I do." The Imam went to Talhah's house. There were a

lot of people there. Imam Ali spoke to Talhah saying: "Talhah, what is this predicament in which you have fallen?"

Talhah said: "Abu al-Hasan, it is too late." The Imam went to the treasury and ordered people to open it. Unable to find the key, he broke the door and distributed some of the money among the people. People then deserted Talhah. 'Uthman was very pleased.

Talhah came to 'Uthman and said: "Amir Al-Mu'minin, I tried to do something but Allah prevented me from doing it."

'Uthman said: "By God, you did not come as repentor; you came only because you were defeated. May God punish you for your intention." (Ibn Al-Athir, *Al-Kamil*, part 3, page 84).

Al-Tabari reported in his history that when 'Uthman was besieged, Ibn Abbas came to see him. 'Uthman said: "Ibn Abbas, come with me." He made him listen to some of the conversations among the besiegers outside the house. They witnessed Talhah pass and ask the people: "Where is Ibn 'Udays (the leader of the Egyptian revoltors)?"

Ibn 'Udays came and conferred secretly with Talhah. Ibn 'Udays then returned to his group and said: "Do not let anyone enter or leave 'Uthman's house."

'Uthman said to Ibn Abbas: "This is an order from Talhah. God, I ask Thee to take care of Talhah Ibn Ubaydullah. He instigated these people against me. By God, I hope his share of the caliphate is zero and that his blood is shed." (*Al-Tabari*, part 4, page 379)

'Aishah

Talhah was not the only collaborator against 'Uthman. His cousin, 'Aishah, was collaborating and campaigning against 'Uthman as well. She was hopeful that Talhah would be the successor to 'Uthman. She said to Ibn Abbas while both were performing the pilgrimage:

"Ibn Abbas, you are endowed with an effective tongue. I ask you in the name of God not to try to scatter people away from Talhah by putting doubt in their minds. The situation of 'Uthman has become obvious. People have come from many locations for something big that is about to happen. I know that Talhah Ibn Ubaydullah has acquired the keys of the treasury houses. If Talhah succeeds 'Uthman, he will follow the path of his cousin Abu Bakr . . ." (*Al-Tabari*, page 407)

Al-Baladhuri in his history (*Ansab Al-'Ashraf*) said that when the situation became extremely grave, 'Uthman ordered Marwan Ibn Al-Hakam and Abdul Rahman Ibn Attab Ibn Asid to try to dissuade 'Aishah from campaigning against him. They went to her while she was preparing to leave for pilgrimage and said:

"We pray that you stay in Medina and that Allah may through you save this man ('Uthman)."

'A'ishah said: "I have prepared my means of transportation and vowed to perform the pilgrimage. By God, I shall not honor your request."

Marwan and Ibn Attab stood up and Marwan said: "Bishr built the fire to stir up the people against me; and when the fire became large he left the scene."

'A'ishah said:

"Marwan, I wish that he ('Uthman) was in one of my sacks, and that I could carry him. I would then throw him into the sea." (*Al-Baladhuri*, part 1 of Vol.4, page 75)

Certainly the revolution against the Third Caliph started in Medina, not in Basra, Kufa, or Egypt. The prominent people of Medina are the ones who wrote to those outside of Medina and instigated them against 'Uthman. To say that a Jew named Ibn Saba is the one who inspired people to revolt against the Caliph is not logical unless we say he is the one who inspired 'A'ishah, Talhah, and Zubayr to revolt. But those who speak of Ibn Saba and his role do not include 'A'ishah and the people of her position as followers of Ibn Saba.

The alleged role of Ibn Saba, in the revolt against 'Uthman, would also be credible if we were to say that Ibn Saba was the one who persuaded the Caliph to follow a path contrary to that of the first two Caliphs, and that he was the one who advised 'Uthman to give Islamic funds to his relatives and appoint them governors of Islamic provinces.

The manner in which 'Uthman conducted the affairs of the Islamic State gave 'A'ishah, along with Talhah, Zubayr, and others, reason to instigate the Muslims against 'Uthman. However, those who attribute the revolution against 'Uthman to Ibn Saba do not accept that Ibn Saba was the one who advised 'Uthman to follow that wrong policy. They are correct, because that alleged Jew never existed except in the imagination of Sayf Ibn 'Umar Al-Tamimi.

It is amazing that such an important role in the revolution against 'Uthman is attributed to a man whose existence has no evidence. Yet historians forget the important role which was played by a person well known in Islamic history, namely: Amr Ibn Al-'As. He was more intelligent and more clever than any Jew that ever existed in that era. Amr had all the reasons to conspire against the Caliph and he had all the abilities to instigate most of the Medinite personalities against him.

Amr Ibn Al-'As

Amr Ibn Al-'As was one of the most dangerous agitators against 'Uthman. He was the governor of Egypt during the reign of the second Caliph. However, the Third Caliph dismissed him and replaced him with his foster brother Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Sarh. Amr became extremely hostile towards 'Uthman.

He returned to Medina and started a malicious campaign against the Third Caliph, accusing him of many wrong doings. 'Uthman blamed Amr and spoke to him harshly. This made Amr even more bitter. He used to meet Zubayr and Talhah and conspire against 'Uthman. He used to meet the pilgrims and inform them of the numerous deviations of 'Uthman. When 'Uthman was besieged, Amr left Medina and went to Palestine. He rested in an area called Al-Saba. He dwelt in a palace called Al-Ajlan. He would repeatedly say "I wonder what news is coming about 'Uthman."

While he was at his palace accompanied by his two sons Muhammad and Abdullah, along with Salamah Ibn Zayd Al-Juthami, a traveler passed by. Amr called him and the following conversation took place:

Q. Where did you come from? A. From Medina. Q. What is 'Uthman doing? A. I left him heavily besieged.

As soon as Amr finished his conversation with the traveler, another traveler appeared. Amr asked:

Q. What is 'Uthman doing? A. He was killed.

Amr retorted saying:

"I am Abu Abdullah. When I scratch an ulcer, I cut it. I used to campaign against him vehemently. I even instigated the shepherds at the top of the mountains to revolt against him."

Salamah Ibn Zayd Al-Juthami said:

"You, the Qurayshites, have broken a strong door between yourselves and the Arabs. Why did you do this?"

Amr answered: "We wanted to bring the truth out of the falsehood." (*Al-Tabari*, part 4, pages 356–57)

The dividers of Muslims ignored what is well-known in the history of Islam and which was reported by a host of good reporters. The revolution against 'Uthman was a result of the efforts of prominent personalities in Medina, such as 'A'ishah, Talhah, Zubayr, Abdul Rahman Ibn Awf, and Amr Ibn Al-'As.

Instead of attributing the revolution to real people who rebelled against 'Uthman and brought about the revolution, the dividers of the Muslims refuse to accept the truth or mention it. They attribute the revolution to an imaginary Jew, relying on the report of Sayf Ibn 'Umar Al-Tamimi, a man who was accused by prominent Sunni scholars to be a man of lies and deviations. They chose to accept Sayf's report in order to cover up for the Caliph, 'A'ishah, Talhah, and Zubayr.

It is even more amazing that 'A'ishah, Talhah, Zubayr, and Mu'awiyah Ibn Abi Sufyan fought the Imam in two wars, unprecedented in the history of Islam. They were the most zealous to smear the reputation of Imam Ali and his followers. Yet the opponents of Imam Ali did not accuse his supporters of being students of Ibn Saba.

History clearly states that Mu'awiyah commanded all the Imams of the mosques throughout the Muslim World to curse Imam Ali at every Friday prayer. If the imaginary Ibn Saba had any small role in the revolution against 'Uthman, Mu'awiyah would have made it the main topic of his defamation campaign against the Imam and his supporters. He would have publicized throughout the Muslim World that those who killed 'Uthman were students of Ibn Saba and that they were the ones who brought Ali to power. However, neither Mu'awiyah nor 'A'ishah took this route because Ibn Saba's story was invented by Sayf Ibn 'Umar Al-Tamimi who lived in the second Hijra century after their death.

Who Started The Battle Of Basra?

The circulators of false accusations against the followers of the members of the House of the Prophet say that the followers of Ibn Saba started the battle of Basra at night just before the negotiations between Imam Ali and his three opponents ('A'ishah, Talhah, and Zubayr) were about to succeed. They started the battle at night by attacking the two armies simultaneously in order to make them plunge into battle. This would abort the peaceful efforts whose stipulations were supposed to include the punishment of 'Uthman's killers. This allegation is opposed to many clear historical facts of which the following events were recorded by Al-Tabari in his history (part 4).

(1). Al-Shi'abi reported the following:

"The right side of Amir Al-Mu'mineen 's army attacked the left side of Basra's army. They fought each other and people resorted to 'A'ishah and most of them were from Dabba and Al-Azd tribes."

"The Battle started after sunrise and continued until afternoon. This means that the fight did not start during the night as the inventors of Ibn Saba claim. The Basrites were defeated and a man from the tribe of Al-Azd said:

'Come back and attack.' Muhammad, son of Imam Ali (Ibn Al-Hanafiyya), hit him with his sword and severed his hand. The man shouted: 'Azdites, run away.' When the Azdites were overwhelmed by the army of the Imam, the Azdites shouted: 'We belong to the religion of Ali Ibn Abi Talib.' " (*Al-Tabari*, page 312)

(2). The report of Qatadah said:

"When the two armies faced each other, Zubayr appeared on his horse while he was well armed. People said to the Imam, 'This is Zubayr.' The Imam said: Zubayr is the more expected of the two to remember God, if he is reminded." Talhah also came to face the Imam. When Imam Ali faced them, he said:

"Certainly you have prepared arms, horses, and men. Did you prepare an excuse for the Day of Judgement when you meet your Lord? Fear God and do not be like the lady who unravels her weaving after she had woven it strongly. Was I not your brother and you used to believe in the sanctity of my blood? Did anything happen to make it legal for you to shed my blood?"

Talhah said:

"You have instigated people against 'Uthman," Imam Ali retorted, quoting from the Qur'an:

"On the Day of Judgement, Allah will pay them their just due, and they will know that He (Allah) is the Manifest truth."

The Imam continued:

"Talhah, you are fighting for the blood of 'Uthman? May God curse those who killed 'Uthman.

"Zubayr, do you remember the day when you passed by with the Messenger of God at Banu Ghunam and he looked at me and smiled? I smiled back at him and you said to him: 'Ibn Abi Talib is always conceited.' The Messenger of God said to you: 'He is not conceited, and you shall fight him unjustly.'"

Zubayr retorted:

"By God, this is true. Had I remembered that, I would not have made this journey. By God, I shall never fight you."

Zubayr left and informed 'A'ishah and his son Abdullah that he took an oath never to fight Imam Ali. His son counseled him to fight the Imam and pay atonement. Zubayr agreed and made his atonement by freeing his slave Makhul. (*Al-Tabari*, pages 501–502)

This event tells us that Talhah and Zubayr confronted the Imam before the start of the battle, and the confrontation was in the day time rather than at night. Otherwise, people could not have seen the confrontation or heard the conversation between the Imam and his opponents. We are sure that there was no electricity for light, nor was there any voice amplifier to make conversations heard.

Since the conversation and the confrontation took place before the start of the battle, it is clear that the report of Sayf about the battle starting during the dark night is a sheer lie.

(3). Al-Zuhri reported that Imam Ali had a dialogue with Zubayr and Talhah before the battle. He said that the Imam said:

"Zubayr, do you fight me for the blood of 'Uthman after you killed him? (by his instigation) May God give the most hostile to 'Uthman among us the consequence which he dislikes. He said to Talhah: 'Talhah, you have brought the wife of the Messenger of God ('A'ishah) to use her for war and hid your wife at your house (in Medina)! Did you not give me your allegiance?'"

Talhah said:

"I gave you the allegiance while the sword was on my neck."

At this point, the Imam tried to invite them to peace, leaving them no excuse. He addressed his army saying:

"Who among you will display this Qur'an and what is in it to the opposing army with the understanding that if he loses his hand he will hold the Qur'an with his other hand...?"

A youth from Kufa said: "I will take the mission."

The Imam went through his army offering them the mission. Only the youth accepted it. The Imam said to him:

"Exhibit this Qur'an and say to them: 'It is between you and us from its beginning to its end. Remember God, and spare your blood and our blood.'"

As the youth called upon them to resort to the Qur'an and surrender to its judgement, the Basrites attacked and killed him. At this time, Imam Ali said to his army: "Now the fight has become legal." The battle started. (*Al-Tabari*, page 905)

All these reports clearly indicate that the battle started in the day time rather than at night, as Sayf Ibn 'Umar has alleged. Had the confrontation between Imam Ali and Talhah and Zubayr taken place at night, it would have had no benefit because the two armies would not have been able to witness it or hear their conversation. Also, the confrontation between the carrier of the Holy Qur'an and the Basrites would have been useless. None of the opposing soldiers could have seen the Qur'an in the hands of the young man at night.

Furthermore, the alleged agreement between the Imam and the three leaders, to punish the ones who shared in 'Uthman's murder, would be logical only if the three leaders were serious in seeking punishment for the killers. But the three leaders were the main agitators who induced people to kill the Third Caliph.

Had the revolted elected Talhah or Zubayr instead of the Imam as Caliph, they would have given the killers of 'Uthman the biggest prize. Certainly the leaders did not seek revenge for the blood of 'Uthman. They only pretended to do that as a means of destroying the Imam's caliphate.

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