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Oppression of the Caliphs upon the blessed grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.)

Ibn Aseer in his Kamil, in context of the events of the year 236 A.H. states, that in this year Mutawakkil ordered the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) to be demolished, as also the houses and buildings surrounding it. He ordered that seeds should be sown there and water to be run upon it, and that the people should be refrained from visiting his grave. In that district it was announced that, “If we find anyone around his grave after three days, we shall throw him into an underground dungeon”.

People dispersed and avoided the pilgrimage, and then it was destroyed and ploughed. Mutawakkil bore intense enmity with Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) and his family, then whoever reached him, who was from among the friends of Ali (a.s.) and that of his family, he would confiscate his wealth and kill him. One of his attendants named Ubadah, the eunuch (al Mukhannas), would tie a pillow upon his stomach below his clothes and bare his bald pate and come to Mutawakkil and dance, while the callers would say “Here is the pot-bellied one, the caliph of the Muslims”.

(They meant imitating Imam Ali, Allah’s refuge) while Mutawakkil would be consuming wine and laughing. One day this play was repeated in the presence of Muntasir (the son of Mutawakkil), who reprimanded Ubadah who then became silent fearing him. Mutawakkil asked him as to what happened; Ubadah arose and informed him about the threat of Muntasir.

Hearing this Muntasir said, “O Commander! The one whom this dog imitates and people laugh upon, is none other than your cousin and a nobleman of your family, while your honor is due to him. If you wish you yourself consume his flesh (malign him), but at least do not hand him over as prey to this dog and the similitudes of him”.

Hearing this Mutawakkil turned towards his announcer and said, “All of you say: The youth is aroused due to his cousin, when still the youth is in his mother’s.....” It was for this reason that Muntasir deemed

lawful to shed the blood of Mutawakkil.

Abul Faraj in his Maqatilat Talibeeyeen says, that Mutawakkil was very severe upon the family of Abi Talib (a.s.) and would spy upon their tasks and would be infuriated and envious towards them, he would be cynical towards them and malign them.

His vizier Ubaydullah bin Yahya imitated him in his hatred and would vilify them near him. And he dealt (such severely) with them as none of the caliphs of Bani Abbas had done before, one of them being plowing the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and destroying its mark. He appointed guards upon all the roads so as to spy upon those who came to visit his grave. Then they should be arrested and brought to him, and then he would kill the pilgrims or persecute them severely.

Ahmad bin Ja'ad Washa' related to me, while he himself was a witness to it, that the reason for plowing the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) was that a female singer dispatched her maid to Mutawakkil, before he assumed the seat of Caliphate, she would sing for him while he would drink wine. One day he summoned her but was told that she was on a journey, while actually she had been to visit the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.).

She received the message of Mutawakkil and hastened back and dispatched one of her maids to him, whom he adored. Mutawakkil asked her, "Where have you been?" She replied, "My mistress had been for the Hajj Pilgrimage and she had taken us along with her". It was the month of Sha'ban and Mutawakkil asked, "Where had you been for Hajj pilgrimage in the month of Sha'ban?" She replied, "To the grave of Husayn". Hearing this he was infuriated and ordered that her mistress should be brought to him. She was imprisoned and all her wealth confiscated.

Then he called for one of his companions named Deezaj, who was a Jew, and ordered him to go to the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and plough it and efface it, as also to ruin it's surroundings. He went and destroyed all the structures surrounding it, as also the shrine. He ruined around twenty acres adjoining it and when he reached the grave none would take lead. Some Jews were then called who ploughed it and ran water around it. He appointed guards surrounding it with a distance of one mile between them, and then there was none who visited his grave, except that he would be arrested and taken to him.

Muhammad bin Husayn Ashnani related to me (Abul Faraj), that a long time passed since I did not go for the pilgrimage to the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) due to fear. One day I made up my mind, that although I have to risk my life, I would go for the pilgrimage. A man, who was a perfume-seller, accompanied me and we entered therein. We hid during the days and traveled at night until we reached the district of Ghaziriyah. We came out at night and passed by from in between the two guards who were fast asleep until we reached his grave.

We could not trace it but we reached it by careful search and insight. The case (of the grave) had been cracked and burnt; water had been run around it, while the structure of bricks had fallen in similar to a trench. We beheld it and fell upon it and such a pleasant fragrance emanated from it, the similitude of

which we had never ever smelt in our lives. I asked the perfume–seller, who was along with me, that, “What is this fragrance?” He replied, “By Allah! I have never ever smelt a perfume similar to this”. Then we parted from there after placing a mark around the grave. Then when Mutawakkil died, we, accompanied by a group of the Shi’ah, went to the grave and searched the marks and found it intact.

Mutawakkil appointed Umar bin Faraj Rajhee upon Makkah and Madinah, who prevented the Progeny of Abi Talib (a.s.) from asking succor from others and desisted people from being kind to them. And if news reached him that anyone had favored them, even if it be less, he would be severely chastised and penalized thoroughly.

Until a time came upon the Alawite women, that they did not have more than one dress, which they would wear periodically to offer Prayers and then remove it and sit bare–back upon the spinning–wheel until Mutawakkil was killed. Then Muntasir turned towards them and favored them while sending wealth for them that was distributed among them, and he aspired by all means to oppose his father, and he did opposite of his tasks while ridiculing him and expressing dislike for his ugly deeds.

Shaikh Al–Tusi in his Amali relates through his chain of authorities from Muhammad bin Abdul Hameed, that I lived adjoining the house of Ibraheem al Deezaj (the dumb ass) and went to meet him during his illness to which he later succumbed. I found him in a wretched state, he was unconscious and a doctor was at his bedside. I inquired of him due to the relation and friendship that I had shared with him and I was his confidante.

He concealed it and signaled towards the doctor’s presence. The doctor perceived his gesture and did not know as to what medicine to prescribe, therefore he arose and left. When we were alone, I again inquired regarding his health. He said, “I shall relate to you and seek pardon from Allah. Mutawakkil ordered me to go to Nainawah and remain guard upon the head of the grave of Husayn. We had orders to plough upon it and destroy the mark of the grave.

At night we went there accompanied by the workers and supervisors, who carried shovels and pick–axes. I commanded my slaves and companions to start the task of destroying the grave and plowing, while I lay down for I was tired of the journey and sleep overtook me. Suddenly a hue and cry arose and my slaves woke me up. I asked, “What has happened to you?” They answered, “Something extraordinary has approached”. I asked as to what it was, and they replied, “A group of men have obstructed us from the grave and are shooting arrows at us”. I arose so as to investigate the matter, and I saw similarly what they had described, while it was the first night of the Layali al Beez.¹ I said, “You too shoot arrows at them”.

They shot arrows but they returned back towards the one who shot it and killed him. Seeing this I was horrified and uneasy, while fever and shivering gripped me. Then I hastened away from near the grave at that very moment, while I was constantly thinking that if I did not perform the orders regarding the grave, Mutawakkil would certainly kill me”.

Abu Burayrah (Muhammad bin Abdul Hameed) says, that I told him, “Do not fear, for yesterday night Mutawakkil has been killed by the help of Muntasir”. He replied, “I too have heard it, but am afflicted with a disease in my body, regarding which I believe that I shall not survive it”. Abu Burayrah says, that it was the first part of the day (when I met him), while Deezaj did not see the night and died.

(Mu'allah) Ibn Khunays relates from Mufazzal, that Muntasir heard that his father Mutawakkil abuses Sayyidah Fatemah (a.s.) (Allah's refuge). He inquired from someone who opined that, “His slaughter is incumbent, but for every son who kills his father, his age is shortened”. Muntasir replied, “I do not mind if my life is reduced after having killed him in Allah's obedience”. He remained alive for seven months after the death of his father.

It is stated in the same book from Qasim bin Ahmad Asadi, that when news reached Mutawakkil (Ja'far bin Mo'tasim) that people from the villages gather at Naynawah for the pilgrimage to the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.), while a large multitude gathers at his grave, he dispatched one of the commanders of his army with a huge cavalry to plough upon the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and desist people from gathering for the pilgrimage.

The commander came to Karbala and executed his orders, while it was the year 237 A.H. The wise men revolted and surrounded them and said, “If until tomorrow you kill all of us, then too you shall not desist those left from amongst us to perform the pilgrimage”. And they saw such wonders that they wrote to Mutawakkil who answered back saying that they should lift their hands off them and go to Kufa and pretend as if they were reconciling the task of people and return back to the kingdom. This situation prevailed until the year 247 A.H. and again news reached Mutawakkil that the wise men and the Kufans go to Karbala for the pilgrimage to the grave of Husayn (a.s.). They gather in large numbers and have prepared a huge market place.

Mutawakkil dispatched another commander with a huge contingent and ordered them to announce that, “Any one who visits the grave of Husayn, his blood and wealth is wasted”. He ordered the grave to be dug and the earth to be ploughed. People refrained from going to the pilgrimage, while the progeny of Abu Talib (a.s.) were pursued and killed, but whatever he had desired, could not be fulfilled.

It is related in the same book from Ubaydullah bin Rabiyyah, that in the year 247 A.H. I went for the Hajj pilgrimage, and while returning back I went to Iraq, while fearing the sovereign. I visited the grave of the Commander of the faithful Imam Ali (a.s.) and then went to visit the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.). I saw that they had ploughed the earth (of the grave) and ran water upon it while bulls were made to work there. I saw with my own eyes that the bulls were driven until they reached the structure of the grave, while they would turn towards the right and left from there. They were being hit severely but it did not prove beneficial and by no means were they placing their feet upon the grave.

Hence I could not visit his grave and returned back to Baghdad saying, “By Allah! If the Bani Umayyah have killed the grandson of the Prophet then his cousins (Bani Abbas) too have oppressed him, by your

life, his grave has been desecrated, while they regret for not having sided with them in your murder, then when he died they pursued him”.

When I reached Baghdad I heard a hue and cry and inquired as to what was the news. It was said to me, “The birds have come and have brought the news of the murder of Ja’far Mutawakkil”. (May Allah’s eternal curse be upon him). I was astonished and said, “O Lord! This night in lieu of that night”.

In the same book it is narrated, that Yahya bin Mugheerah Razi says, that I was with Jareer bin Abdul Hameed. An Iraqi man came to him and Jareer inquired from him regarding the people of Iraq. He replied, “Rasheed (Haroon) destroyed the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and ordered the lote-tree (near it) to be cut down”. Jareer lifted up both of his hands and said, “Allah is Great! A tradition has reached us from the Prophet of Allah (S) regarding this, who said thrice:

“May Allah’s curse be upon the one who fells the lote-tree.”

Until now we were unaware of its interpretation, felling it would mean ruining the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) so that people would lose its track.

It is related in the same book from Umar bin Faraj Rajahee, that Mutawakkil dispatched me to desecrate the grave of Husayn (a.s.). I reached the area and commanded that the bulls be left to run upon the grave. When they reached the grave, they would not run upon it, while I beat them with my staff until it broke in my hands. By Allah! They would not step upon the grave nor lay their feet upon it.

It is related in Manaqib, that Mustarshid looted the wealth of the shrine and the city of Karbala, saying, “A Grave is in no need of wealth”. He distributed it among his troops and when he left from there, he was killed along with his son Rashid.²

1. Layali al Beez refers to the 13th, 14th and 15th of every lunar month.

2. Coincidentally, as I reach the (edition of the) translation of this book until here, an important turn of events has taken place at Iraq. The despotic Bathist regime (of my time), under the dictatorial rule of Saddam Husayn al Tikriti, finally came to an end after many years. Saddam ruled with an iron fist imitating the example of Yazid and Mutawakkil, while none could oppose his barbaric acts. The worst affected ones being the Shi’ah whom he persecuted in the worst possible manner, which is difficult to be expressed in words.

Hundreds of Maraje’, Ulama and general public were put to death by his blood thirsty family members and troops loyal to him. One cannot also forget the brutal murder of Ayatullah al Uzma Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al Sadr and his Erudite sister Sayyidah Bintul Huda, Ayatullah al Uzma Shaikh Murtaqa Burujerdi, Ayatullah al Uzma Mirza Ali Gharawi, Ayatullah al Uzma Sayyid Muhammad Sadr, Ayatullah al Uzma Sayyid Husayn Bahrul Uloom, Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al Khoei and scores of other Ulama.

During the uprising of 1991 when the Shi’ah of the twin Holy Cities of Najaf and Karbala arose against his despotic regime, they were suppressed in the most horrible manner, while even the Holy Mausoleums of Imam Ali (a.s.), Imam Husayn (a.s.) and Hazrat Abbas (a.s.) had to face the brunt of his aggression. The Shrines were desecrated and thousands of Shi’ah and Ulama were killed inside the Courtyard while the great Marja’ of the Shi’ah world Ayatullah al Uzma Sayyid Abul Qasim al

Khoei was persecuted and later died under suspicious circumstances. Then came the Moharram of 1424 Hijra (2003 A.D.) and Iraq was attacked by the US and her coalition forces under the pretext of possessing weapons of mass destruction, thus putting an end to Saddam's barbaric regime.

Finally after many years, the Arba'een (fortieth day of the martyrdom) of Imam Husayn (a.s.) was observed with complete reverence with no prohibitions. Consequently this Yazid and Mutawakkil of our age had to face the consequences similar to his predecessors whose acts he shamelessly imitated, verifying the words of Prophet Muhammad (S) who had said, "They shall bury them and shall erect a symbol for the grave of the Master of Martyrs (Imam Husayn) in that expanse desert, which will act as a guide for the righteous and a means of affluence for the believers. And the followers of misguidance and infidelity will try to erase it, but its mark would not but increase evidently".

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