

The Fourth Journey – Kufa to Shaam

Bibi Zainab's speeches had stirred Kufa. The people of Kufa were filled with remorse. There was unrest in the city. In the market place they were whispering: 'What have we done? How could we invite the Prophet's grandson and then desert him to be mercilessly butchered at Karbala'? How can we permit the Holy Prophet's grand daughters be paraded in the streets like slaves? What have we done?'

Ibn Ziyad feared that the people of Kufa might rise against him. He ordered that the prison be strictly guarded. No one was allowed to visit them. Only the most trusted guards were allowed in or around the prison. In the mean time messengers ran between Kufa and Damascus. Although at first Yazid had ordered that the captives be detained at Kufa until he had completed all the arrangements for their entry into Shaam (Damascus), because of the mood in Kufa, Ibn Ziyad was anxious to have the prisoners out of Kufa as soon as possible. It was agreed that they be taken to Shaam.

Once again the prisoners were assembled and a procession left Kufa. But this time the departure was kept secret from the people of Kufa and took place at night.

So began the fourth journey of tears! It was a long and difficult journey.

Who was the hero and who was the heroine of this journey through the Iraqi and the Syrian deserts? Was it Bibi Rubaab, who from her unsaddled camel kept on staring at Ali Asghar's cradle loaded on another camel carrying the goods looted from Husayn's camp during the Shaam al-Gareeba? Was it Bibi Sakina who now sat mournfully on her mother's lap staring at the 'alam of Hazrat Abbas and her mashk still tied to the 'alam, and who kept whispering: "I am not thirsty, Uncle, I am not thirsty!" Was the hero Imam Zain ul 'Abideen who was made to walk all the way, the hot chains eating into his flesh?

Some times our Fourth Imam would faint. His captors however knew no pity. They would flog him if he slowed down or fainted. On these occasions Bibi Zainab would intervene to stop the Imam from being flogged to death.

This was the journey of which the hero was the valour of Hazrat Ali which ruled the heart of Imam Zain ul 'Abideen and the heroine was the sabr of Fatimah Zahra which inspired Bibi Zainab.

The journey from Kufa to Shaam was a long one. It took over twenty days. The women and the children were exhausted. Their suffering was great! Quite often the children would faint under the scorching desert heat and fall off the camels.

The mothers would scream. Imam Zain ul 'Abideen and Bibi Zainab would go looking for the children. Sometimes they would find them by the road side barely alive and there were occasions when they were discovered too late. Our fourth Imam would dig a grave to bury the dead child. An historian revisiting this route a few years later discovered a large number of small graves on the way side!

Some Zakirs narrate the following story: Once Bibi Zainab looked at the camel on which Bibi Sakina was riding. Bibi Sakina was not there! She looked at all the other camels, Bibi Sakina was nowhere to be seen. She panicked. Where could Imam Husayn's darling daughter be? She asked Shimr to untie her so that she could go and look for Bibi Sakina. At first Shimr responded with his whip. Unmindful of her own pain she kept on begging.

Shimr untied her with the warning that if she did not return soon he would flog Imam Zain ul 'Abideen to death. Bibi Zainab ran in the direction from which they had travelled. Some distance away she saw an elderly lady holding Bibi Sakina affectionately, kissing her cheeks and wiping away her tears. She could hear Bibi Sakina telling the lady how her uncle Hazrat Abbas had gone to fetch her water and how he had never returned. When Bibi Sakina saw her aunt she explained that she had fallen off the camel but the kind lady had looked after her. Bibi Zainab turned to the lady and said, "May Allah reward you for your kindness to this orphan!" The lady replied, "Zainab, my dear, how can you thank your own mother? Do you not recognize me?" As the lady lifted her face, Bibi Zainab saw that it was Fatimah Zahra!!

When the caravan reached the outskirts of Damascus Omar Sa'ad sent a message to Yazid that they had arrived. Yazid ordered that the caravan remain where it was until the morning. He wanted the people of Shaam to line the streets to look at the captives and witness his victory. In the meantime the streets through which the captives were to be marched were being decorated with flags and pennants.

Bibi Zainab had conquered Kufa. Now Shaam had come and was waiting for her!

The Court of Yazid

When at long last the caravan reached the outskirts of Damascus, a message was received by Umar Sa'ad that the prisoners were not to be brought into the capital until Yazid had completed all the preparations.

Yazid invited all the ambassadors, foreign dignitaries and leading citizens to his court. People were ordered to line up the streets. Musicians were asked to play music and dancers were told to dance in the streets. Such were the festivities organized by the Khalifah for the entry of the grandson and the grand daughters of the Holy Prophet of Islam into what had become the metropolis of the Islamic Empire!!

Surrounded by the dancers, the musicians and the jeering crowds of the citizens of Damascus the prisoners were led toward the palace of Yazid. The ladies who had never stepped outside their homes without their heads and faces being covered, had been forced to travel from Karbala' to Kufa, and Kufa to Shaam bare headed and with their arms tied with a single rope. If any one of them stumbled, she was whipped. Never in the history of Islam had prisoners been treated with disrespect, let alone the cruelty meted out to the members of the Holy Prophet's household. And now, this ultimate insult of being led into the court of Yazid like a herd of cattle!

Bibi Zainab seemed to be drawing strength from some divine source. She wiped away her tears. Drew her hair over her face so as to hide as much of her face from the staring crowds as she could. Other ladies did the same. Imam Zain ul 'Abideen straightened himself. Exuding dignity and confidence, he maintained his position behind the bearer of the lance upon which was mounted his father's head. Such was the jostle of the multitude thronging the streets that it took them more than twelve hours to traverse the short distance between the city gates and the palace.

They entered the palace and were made to stand in front of Yazid. The tyrant was dressed in his best finery. Imam Husayn's head was formally presented to him by Umar ibn Sa'ad. Yazid, with a cup of wine in one hand, ceremoniously accepted the ultimate symbol of his victory and commanded Umar Sa'ad to call out the names of the prisoners.

And then, in his drunken arrogance, Yazid recited a few couplets which enshrine a diabolical confession, a confession that explains the history of the division in Islam and the motives not only his but of his father and grand father in accepting Islam! He said:

“If my venerable ancestors who fell at Badr fighting Muhammad had witnessed how the supporters of Muhammad's faith were thrown into confusion with thrusts given with my spears, they would be blessing me today. The Banu Hashim played a trick to win power. There was never any wahi to them nor did they receive any revelation. Today the souls of my ancestors and friends killed by Muhammad at Badr will rest in peace!”

The raison d'etre of the Umayyad dynasty was vengeance against Islam, a sanguine continuation of Uhud where Yazid'd grand-mother had been only partially successful in her determination to have Ali and Hamza killed in retaliation for the deaths of her father and brother at Badr!! Yazid never believed in Islam, and yet the system forced upon the people after the death of the Holy Prophet had resulted in this worst of all the hypocrites becoming the Khalifah of the Holy Prophet and the Ameer-ul-Mu'mineen of the ummah!!

Yazid looked at the prisoners lined up in front of him. He said: “It has pleased Allah to grant us victory! Look how He has caused the death of Husayn and humiliated his family!” He then recited an ayah of the Holy Quraan which means 'Allah grants honour to whom He pleases and brings disgrace upon whom He pleases.'

There were over seven hundred dignitaries sitting in the Court. They smiled and nodded approvingly. Bibi Zainab could stand it no more! She was filled with wrath. How dare this unclean man say such things? How dare he with his najis tongue recite from Holy Quraan? How dare he make mockery of the family of the Holy Prophet? In a loud and clear voice Bibi Zainab said: “O Yazid! Do you think that it is Allah who has caused you to commit all these foul deeds?”

Do you blame the Rahman and the Rahim for the oppression we have suffered? Do you blame Allah for the death of the beloved grand son of his most beloved Prophet? How dare you make these false accusations against the Almighty? No, Yazid, it was not Allah! It is you, with your insatiable ambition and greed for wealth and power, who are the only cause of the suffering inflicted not only upon the household of the Holy Prophet but on Islam itself!

Do not forget what Allah has said in the Holy Book: Let not the unbelievers take it that the respite We give them would do them any good. We allow them time in order that they might continue to indulge in sin to their hearts' content. Indeed a humiliating punishment has been kept ready for them.

Do you think that by killing the grandson of the Holy Prophet and bringing us to your palace as prisoners, you have scored a victory against Islam? No, Yazid, no! Husayn with his blood has made sure that tyrants like you will not be able to use Islam as a toy to carry out their evil designs. The victory is not yours. The victory is of Husayn! The victory is of Islam!”

Yazid was stunned! The people present there could not but be moved by what this courageous lady had to say. This lady, who had seen and experienced great suffering, dared today defy the very man who had inflicted those sufferings. Who was she? They asked one another. When they learnt that she was the grand daughter of the Holy Prophet, their hearts began to fill with admiration!

In an effort to save the situation Yazid turned towards Imam Zain ul 'Abideen and said: “Well you can tell us who has been victorious. Imam looked at him and replied:

“Yazid, final victory can only belong to those on the right path. Let us look at you and look at Husayn. My father, whom you got killed so mercilessly, was the grandson of the Holy Prophet who had said that “Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn.” He was born a Muslim and all his life he upheld the laws and principles of Islam. You are the grandson of Abu Sufiyan and Hinda, who most of their lives fought Islam and the Holy Prophet!”

Yazid was now greatly embarrassed. To silence the Imam he asked his muezzin to recite the adhaan. When the Muezzin cried out '**ash-hadu anna Muhammadar-Rasuul'ul-Lah'** Imam Zain ul 'Abideen, addressing Yazid, said, “Yazid speak the truth! Was Muhammad my grandfather or your grandfather!”

Yazid ordered the prisoners to be moved to a prison. This was not a prison. It was a dungeon! Only a part of it had any sort of ceiling. The rest was open to the sky. An iron grill surrounded the place so that no one could get in or out.

Bibi Zainab reports that the place was so cold at nights that no one could have proper sleep. During the day, it got hot like an oven. It is here that our fourth Imam, still under chains, the ladies and the children spent many days of great agony and discomfort.

Bibi Sakina

Bibi Sakina was the youngest daughter of Imam Husayn. She was a vivacious child, full of love and happiness. Everyone loved Bibi Sakina. She was also a very religious girl. She enjoyed reading the Holy Quraan and never missed her prayers. From the age of two she took great care to make sure that her head and face were properly covered when in public.

Bibi Sakina was Imam Husayn's most beloved child. Our Imam was often heard to say, "A house without Bibi Sakina would not be worth living in!" She always had a sweet and cheerful smile and a very friendly nature. Other children sought her company as much as the grown ups did. She was very generous and always shared whatever she had with others.

There was a special bond between Hazrat Abbas and Bibi Sakina. He loved her more than he did his own children. If Bibi Sakina requested for anything, Hazrat Abbas would not rest until he satisfied her request. There was nothing that Hazrat Abbas would not do to make Bibi Sakina happy.

During the journey from Madina to Mecca and then Mecca to Karbala', Hazrat Abbas was often seen riding up to the mehmil in which Bibi Sakina sat to make sure that she had everything she wanted. Bibi Sakina loved her uncle just as much. While in Madina she would, several times a day, visit the house in which Hazrat Abbas lived with his family and his mother, Ummul Baneen.

Like any other four-five year old when Bibi Sakina went to bed at night she wanted to spend some time with her father. Imam Husayn would tell her stories of the prophets and of the battles fought by her grand-father Ali. She would rest her head on her father's chest and Husayn would not move from her until she fell asleep. When from the second of Muharram the armies of Yazid began to gather at Karbala', Husayn said to his sister Zainab, "The time has come for you to get Bibi Sakina used to going to sleep without my being there!" Bibi Sakina would follow her father at night and Imam Husayn had to gently take her to Bibi Zainab or Bibi Rubaab.

At Karbala' when from the seventh Muharram water became scarce Bibi Sakina shared whatever little water she had with other children. When soon there was no water at all, the thirsty children would look at Bibi Sakina hopefully, and because she could not help them she would have tears in her eyes. Bibi Sakina's lips were parched with thirst.

On the Ashura day, she gave her Mashk to Hazrat Abbas. He went to get water for her. The children gathered round Bibi Sakina with their little cups, knowing that as soon as Hazrat Abbas brought any water, Bibi Sakina would first make sure that they had some before taking any herself. When Bibi Sakina

saw Imam Husayn bringing the blood drenched 'alam she knew that her uncle Hazrat Abbas had been killed. From that day on Bibi Sakina never complained of thirst.

Then came the time when the earth shook and Bibi Sakina became an orphan! But even then she always thought of the others first. She would console her mother on the death of Ali Asghar and when she saw any other lady or child weeping Bibi Sakina would put her little arms around her.

Yes Bibi Sakina never again asked anyone for water. Bibi Zainab would persuade her to take a few sips, but she herself would never ask for water or complain of thirst!!!!

From the time when Imam Husayn fell in the battle field, Bibi Sakina forgot to smile! Kufa saw her as a sombre little girl lost in thought. Quite often she would sit up at night. When asked if she wanted anything, she would say, "I just heard a baby cry? Is it Asghar? He must be calling out for me!" Knowing that her weeping upset her mother, Bibi Sakina would cry silently and quickly wipe away her tears! In the prison in Shaam she would stare at the flock of birds flying to their nests at sunset and innocently ask Bibi Zainab, "Will Sakina be going home like those birds flying to their homes?"

Then one dreadful night Bibi Sakina went to bed on the cold floor of the prison. For a long time she stared into the darkness! The time for the morning prayers came. Bibi Sakina was still lying with her eyes wide open. Her mother called out: "Wake up, Sakina! Wake up, it is time for prayers, my child!" There was only the painful silence! Our fourth Imam walked up to where Bibi Sakina lay. He put his hand on her forehead. It was cold! He put his hand near the mouth and the nose. Bibi Sakina had stopped breathing. In between sobs Imam Zain ul 'Abideen said: "**inna lil-Lahi wa inna ilay-hi raja'uun.**"

How was Bibi Sakina buried? Bibi Zainab held the still child as Imam Zain ul 'Abideen dug a grave in the cell. As the grave was being filled up after the burial the mother let out a scream! How could anyone console Bibi Rubaab? What could they say? They huddled around her, and the prison walls began to shake with the cry: "**ya Sakina, ya madhloomah!!**" Bibi Rubaab put her cheek on Bibi Sakina's grave and cried out: "Speak to me, Sakina! Only a word, my child! Speak to me!!"

Aza' al-Husayn in Shaam

The tragedy of Karbala' had begun to arouse great sympathy for the Ahlul Bait in Hejaz and Iraq. Even in Damascus some people began to ask whether it was necessary to inflict so much sufferings on the members of the family of the Holy Prophet.

When the charming little Bibi Sakina died and the people of Damascus came to learn about the death of the little girl whom they had seen and come to admire, they began to talk openly about Yazid's cruelty. Yazid feared that the people might rise against him. He was now anxious to get rid of the prisoners.

He called Imam Zain ul 'Abideen and told him that he was prepared to free them, and compensate them for the death of the martyrs. He also asked the fourth Imam whether they wanted to remain in Damascus

or return to Madina. Imam Zain ul 'Abideen replied that he would consult his aunt Bibi Zainab.

When Imam spoke to Bibi Zainab she was grief stricken at the audacity of Yazid in offering compensation. She said, "Tell Yazid to talk of compensation with the Holy Prophet. We would certainly return to Madina. But first Yazid should provide a house so that we may hold mourning ceremonies for the martyrs in Damascus. We shall then go to Madina via Karbala' to visit the graves of the martyrs."

Imam Zain ul 'Abideen conveyed the message to Yazid who after some hesitation agreed. In asking for a house to mourn the martyrs in Damascus, Bibi Zainab scored a major victory over Yazid. When the house was made available the ladies held Aza' al-Husayn for seven days in the very city which was the capital of Yazid who had murdered Imam Husayn.

The women of Damascus poured in to offer their condolences and Bibi Zainab and the other ladies would tell them of how the martyrs had been killed, how they had been denied water, how young children had been crying al-atash, how Imam had taken Ali Asghar and pleaded for a few drops of water and how the baby had been slain. These tales so moved the ladies of Damascus that they would break into sobs and begin wailing and beating their chests.

Thus in the very house of the murderer Bibi Zainab laid the foundation of Aza' al-Husayn. This is so much like the story of Hazrat Musa (A.S.). Firaun orders all the male children of Banu Israel to be put to death. Allah's miracle is that his Prophet of wahdaniyyah finds refuge in the palace of the very Firaun who had plotted to kill him!

These majlises have continued to this day. Every Muharram Shiahs all over the world gather together to mourn the tragedy which took place more that 1,350 years ago. These majaalis have a great meaning for us. Firstly, they mean that we love our Imam and grieve for the suffering to which he was subjected.

Secondly they mean that year after year we protest against all that Yazid stood for. We make a solemn promise to Allah never to follow Yazid's foot-steps. In whatever country we may be, we have to remember that taking alcohol or any kind of drugs, is Yazid's way. To keep ourselves ignorant of Quraan or Islamic way of life, is Yazid's way. To oppress anyone, is Yazid's way. To indulge in any un-Islamic activity, is Yazid's way. We can not mourn Husayn and follow Yazid!!

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