

Chapter 4: Muslim bin Aqil proceeds to Kufa

Muslim went to Kufa via Madina and stayed in the house of Mukhtar bin Abi Ubayda Thaqafi. The supporters perhaps thought that the task would be accomplished quite easily. Husayn bin Ali would gain victory over Yazid without facing any trouble. Justice and piety would replace injustice and sin, and the people would easily forget what Mu'awiya had taught them for forty two years.

They used to visit Muslim frequently and when the Imam's letter was read for them, they shed tears of delight with perfect sincerity, and took the oath of allegiance at the hand of the special representative of the Imam. According to Shaykh Mufid seventeen thousand persons took the oath of allegiance to Muslim bin Aqil, but the number mentioned by Tabari is twelve thousand.

Now Yazid came to know that Muslim had arrived in Kufa and the supporters of Imam Ali had taken the oath of allegiance to him, and Nua'man bin Bashir had shown weakness in taking action against him. He, therefore, appointed Ubaydullah bin Ziyad, the Governor of Basra as the Governor of Kufa as well, and also entrusted him with the task of carrying out his oppressive orders. He wrote to him: "You should go to Kufa, pursue Muslim and captivate, kill, or banish him."

Ubaydullah proceeded to Kufa immediately and on the very first day of his arrival in the city he addressed the people and spoke about the kindness as well as harshness of Yazid. He summoned the chiefs of the tribes and various classes of the society and behaved very harshly towards them. Now the people of Kufa reached the stage at which the number of the supporters of truth diminishes, and that of the followers of falsehood increases. The Almighty Allah says:

"Do people think that they will not be tested because they say, "We have faith?" We tested those who were before them. Thus Allah knows those, who are truthful, and knows those, who are liars." (Surah al-Ankabut, 29:2- 3)

The truthful are those persons who stick firmly, even at the time of test and trial, to what they have said and assessed. Fear and desire do not dissuade them from the truth, which they have recognized. Nothing can place them amongst the supporters of falsehood. As regards the liars they are those, who really speak the truth and correctly distinguish between truth and falsehood before they are involved in

the difficulties of Divine test, and think themselves to be the supporters of truth and enemies of falsehood, and say that they would defend truth even if they have to lay down their lives for it.

The promises of falsehood and the allurements of the world would not make them deviate from the right path, but as soon as the circumstances change and the time for making sacrifices for truth arrives their mental attitude changes. Fear and poor spirit take the place of courage; doubt and hesitation that of faith; and polytheism and treachery that of sincerity. The liars are not only those, who have no intention of siding with truth and opposing falsehood even before the time for test arrives, but liars are also those, whose condition changes at the time of Divine test, and what they consider falsehood today was considered truth by them till yesterday.

The people of Kufa i.e. those who, after receiving the news of the death of Mu'awiya, gathered in the house of Sulayman bin Surd Khuzai, delivered speeches, took into consideration the position of the Muslims at that time and wrote a letter to the Imam from that very place and similarly those who visited Muslim after his arrival in Kufa and took oath of allegiance to him in his capacity of the special representative of the Imam of the time, did not in fact intend to tell lies and deceive their Imam and to provide means for his martyrdom and the captivity of the members of his family. Truly speaking their intentions were quite good.

They deemed the caliphate of a person like Yazid, and that too after fifty years of the death of the Holy Prophet, to be shameful and inadmissible for the world of Islam, and did not consider anyone amongst all the Muslims to be more competent and more deserving than Husayn bin Ali the son of the Holy Prophet. They thought that they had always rendered him assistance and would continue to do so in all circumstances and would bear all hardships to achieve their Divine object. They turned out to be liars and forgot what they had been thinking about themselves earlier.

So long as Nu'man bin Basir Ansari had been running the administration of the city moderately and leniently the supporters were very enthusiastic. They claimed at every place and in every meeting to be the supporters of Husayn bin Ali and wrote that they would pursue Nu'man bin Bashir up to the gates of Damascus. However, as they had previous experience of the harshness of Ubaydullah bin Bashir Ansari had been running the administration of the changed as soon as Ubaydullah assumed the Governorship of Kufa. Previously they talked about Jihad (the Holy war), but now they began to recite the Qur'anic verse:

“Do not subject your lives to destruction with your own hands”. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 195)

The greater was the hold of Ibn Ziyad over the affairs of Kufa, the greater was the danger for Muslim and his companions and now there was no possibility of their success. The mental and religious disposition of the people proceeded towards a direction contrary to that which they had assessed earlier, so much so that the entire atmosphere of the city was completely changed.

The attitude of the people, who really wished that Imam Husayn should come at the helm of affairs and

Bani Umayya should be deprived of the Islamic Government, underwent such a change that although Muslim bin Aqil was keeping himself aloof and seldom met the people, he was obliged to shift from the house of Mukhtar bin Abi Ubayda Thaqafi to that of a well-known and powerful person named Hani bin Urwa Muradi. His supporters used to visit him there secretly.

The conditions in Kufa at that time indicated that all the letters which had been sent to Imam Husayn and the promises made with him were mere lies and could no longer be relied upon. Ibn Ziyad succeeded in locating the place where Muslim was then residing. He gave three thousand dirhams to his slave named Ma'qal and said to him: "Associate with the friends and supporters of Muslim for a few days and pretend to be one of them. Give them this money also and say that you are interested in their success and the money is meant for being spent on the procurement of implements of war. After gaining their confidence you may find out the place where Muslim is residing and meet him".

Ma'qal acted as ordered by Ibn Ziyad. In the first instance he contacted, in the Masjid of Kufa, Muslim bin Awsaja (who was one of the distinguished supporters of the Imam and was martyred on the day of Ashura) because he had heard that Muslim bin Awsaja was obtaining the allegiance from the people on behalf of Imam Husayn. Ma'qal, who was prepared to tell any lie, and commit any treachery to achieve his end, said to Muslim bin Awsaja: "I am a man from Syria and Allah has blessed me with love for the Holy Prophet's family and their supporters". Saying this he also shed some crocodile tears and then said: "I have got three thousand dirhams. I wish to present this money to the man who, I understand, has come from the Hijaz to Kufa to take the oath of allegiance for the son of the Holy Prophet.

However, I have to say with much regret that it has not been possible for me to see him and have not yet met anyone, who may guide me to him, and thus enable me to achieve this blessing. I have enquired from various persons and have since come to know that you are acquainted with this Holy household. I have, therefore, to request you to take this petty amount from me and take me to Muslim bin Aqil. I am your Muslim brother and you should trust me. If you so wish I am prepared to take the oath of allegiance to the Imam before I go and see Muslim".

Muslim bin Awsaja said: "I am glad to meet you, for you may possibly render some assistance to Ahlul Bayt. However, I am worried on account of the fact that the people have come to know before the accomplishment of the task and achievement of the goal that I am associated with this movement. I am apprehensive of the tyrannical Ibn Ziyad in this regard". Ma'qal said: "God willing, all will be well. You may please take the allegiance from me".

Muslim took the oath from him and obtained a promise that he would remain loyal and would not divulge the secret. Ma'qal made all the promises and took all the oaths demanded by Muslim bin Awsaja without any hesitation. He even added something to it and satisfied him.

Then he visited the house of Muslim bin Awsaja for a few days and eventually had access to Muslim bin Aqil and took the oath of allegiance once again. As directed by Muslim bin Aqil he also presented three

thousand dirhams to Abu Thamama Saidi Hamdani, a staunch supporter and one of the martyrs of Karbala, who was then responsible for the procurement of arms, food and other provisions.

Ma'qal used to come to see Muslim bin Aqil earlier than all others and was the last to leave. He thus acquired information about all their activities and submitted reports to Ibn Ziyad regularly. Ibn Ziyad thought that he should first arrest Hani and then take steps to arrest Muslim. Consequently Hani also confined himself to his house on the pretext of illness and did not go to the Governor's House till Muhammad bin Ash'ath, Asma bin Kharija and Amr bin Hajjaj Zubaydi approached him in compliance with the orders of Ibn Ziyad. As a measure of expediency they made him mount an animal, and took him to Ibn Ziyad.

With the arrest of Hani the situation in Kufa became absolutely favorable for Ibn Ziyad. Although Hani expressed ignorance about the presence of Muslim bin Aqil in his house the secret was divulged by the arrival of Ma'qal there. Hani was, therefore, obliged to confess before Ibn Ziyad and said: "I did not take Muslim to my house. He himself came and asked me to admit him. I felt ashamed to refuse his request and, therefore entertained him. As regards his activities whatever has been reported is correct. Now I can promise you that no harm will come to you from me and I will have nothing to do with him. As an alternative I can go and apologize to him, and ask him to go wherever he likes".

Ibn Ziyad did not, however, accept either of the two offers made by him and said: "By Allah you must surrender him to me". Hani replied: "By Allah I will not surrender him to you". When he declined to surrender his guest Ibn Ziyad broke his face, nose and head with a stick, which he had in his hand, and put him under arrest. Then he went to the Masjid, mounted the pulpit and severely threatened the people in a brief speech. He had not yet come down from the pulpit when the spectators rushed into the Masjid and said that Muslim bin Aqil was coming. Ubaydullah then entered his palace hurriedly and shut the gates.

It is very surprising that twelve or seventeen thousand persons had taken the oath of allegiance to Muslim, but, when he came to know about what had happened to Hani and called his supporters to rise, not more than four thousand persons turned up. And still more surprising is that at the time when Muslim came out with four thousand armed men and Ibn Ziyad closed the doors of his palace, not more than fifty persons were with him, and out of them thirty were policemen and the remaining twenty were some dignitaries and the members of his family.

The people had encircled his palace and were abusing him and his father. This apparently favorable state of affairs became so unfavorable in the early part of night that Muslim bin Aqil offered evening prayers in the night of 9th Zil-Haj in the Masjid of Kufa with only thirty persons and when he left the Masjid only ten persons were with him, and when he came out of the Masjid there was not even one person, who might accompany him.

Allah knows those who are truthful, and knows those who are liars. (Surah al-Ankabut, 29:3)

It is a sufficient proof of the falsity of the claims, correspondence and pretences of the Kufians that four thousand armed men could not subdue Ibn Ziyad, who had not more than fifty persons with him, and gain control over the city, and only one false rumor spread by the supporters of Ibn Ziyad that the Syrian army was arriving, scattered all of them.

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