

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Death of the Holy Prophet

Election Of Abu Bakr As The First Caliph

When the dead body of the Holy Prophet of Islam was being prepared for burial, the Ansar assembled at their meeting place 'Saqifa-i-Bani Sa'dah' to discuss the question of succession to the Holy Prophet. The Holy Prophet was the last of the prophets, and there could be no prophet after him. He was also the Leader of the Muslims, and it was necessary that after him there should be some one who should be the head of the community.

At the meeting at Saqifa-i-Bani Sa'dah, Sa'd bin Ubadah made a passionate plea that the successor to the Holy Prophet for managing the temporal affairs of the community should be chosen from among the Ansars. He argued that they were the people who had protected Islam, and had offered a home for the Holy Prophet and his companions when they were persecuted by their own people. It was through their efforts that Islam had spread and grown. When Sa'd completed his speech he was applauded by the audience and it appeared as if the Ansars were going to choose him as their Leader in succession to the Holy Prophet.

While the meeting was being held at Saqifa-i-Bani Sa'dah some one reported to the Muhajreen assembled at Masjid-Nabvi that the Ansars had assembled to choose a successor to the Holy Prophet. It was a critical situation. The burial of the Holy Prophet was a matter that needed priority, but the question of choosing a successor to the Holy Prophet was a question of life and death for the Muslim community and if any wrong decision was taken at that stage, the future of Islam was likely to be jeopardised. Umar accordingly prevailed upon Abu Bakr to proceed to Saqifa-i-Bani Sa'dah to negotiate the matter with the Ansars before it was too late.

When Abu Bakr, Umar, and Abu Ubaidah reached the Saqifa-i-Bani Sa'dah, the Ansars were on the verge of electing Sa'd bin Ubadah as the successor to the Holy Prophet. Abu Bakr took the stage and explained that the Quraish were the custodians of the House of God at Mecca, and as such it was necessary that the successor to the Holy Prophet should be chosen from among the Quraish. Addressing his appeal to the Ansar he said:

"O Ansar, none can deny the superiority of your position, or the greatness of your eminence in Islam. You were chosen by Allah as the helpers of His religion and His Apostle. To you the Prophet was sent on his emigration from Mecca and from among you come the majority of his companions and his wives. Indeed, in position you are next only to the earliest companions. Therefore it would be fair if we take the Amirate and you accept the Wazirate. You should not be obstinate in your stand. We assure you that we will do nothing without consulting you."

This did not satisfy the Ansars. Habab bin Mandhar rose to say that the Amirate was the right of the Ansars and they could not forego that right. He added that the utmost concession that they could make in favour of the Muhajreen was that they could have two Amirs, one from the Ansars and the other from the Muhajreen.

Umar said that this would create a division between the Ansars and the Muhajreen and that would be against the interests of Islam. Islam stood for unity-one God, one Prophet and one Quran. It followed as a necessary corollary that the Muslim community should remain united and should have one Amir. If the proposal of having two Amirs from the Ansars and Muhajreen was accepted, other tribes would later lay claim to the election of their Amir as well. Such multiple Amirates would lead to the disintegration of Islamic polity. Umar emphasised that in the interests of the solidarity of Islam they should not have more than one Amir and that such Amir should be chosen from among the Quraish, the tribe of the Holy

Prophet.

There was some further exchange of hot words between Habab and Umar. Abu Bakr took the stage again and said:

"God is my witness that we are not pressing the claim of the Quraish because of any selfish interest. The proposal is prompted in the interest of the solidarity of Islam. To give you a proof positive of our sincerity I declare before you that I do not covet the office. Here are Umar and Abu Ubaidah. You may choose any one of these."

This appeared to have some effect on the Ansars. Zaid bin Thabit an eminent Ansar said:

"In fact the Holy Prophet was from the emigrants Hence it is necessary that the Imam is also selected from among them. God chose us as Helpers, and we should continue to help the successor of the Holy Prophet in the same way as we helped the Holy Prophet himself."

Supporting him, Bashir bin Sad another Ansar leader said: "O Ansar! if we have secured a position of superiority in the holy wars against the polytheists and gained precedence in matters of religion, it was with the object of pleasing our Allah and obeying our Prophet. It is not proper to make this as a ground for self aggrandisement. We should leave our reward to Allah. We must realise that the Holy Prophet came from the Quraish, and that the Quraish have strongest claims for his successorship. We should not quarrel with the Quraish on this issue."

That turned the tables and the Ansars now appeared to be inclined to choose the Leader from among the Quraish. There upon Abu Bakr repeated his proposal that they might choose any one out of Umar and Abu Ubaidah.

Umar rose to say:

"O Abu Bakr, how can I or Abu Ubaidah be preferred to you.

You were the second of the two in the Cave. You were appointed as Amir-ul-Hajj. During his illness the Holy Prophet appointed you as the Imam to lead the prayers. Of all the Companions you were the dearest to the Holy Prophet, and so you are dearest to us. Stretch your hand so that we may offer our allegiance to you."

Umar made Abu Bakr stand, and he was the first to touch the hand of Abu Bakr reverently in token of allegiance. Abu Ubaidah was the next to offer allegiance. Thereafter the Ansars except Said bin Ubadah advanced turn by turn to offer allegiance to Abu Bakr.

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