

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Uthman's Concept of the Caliphate

Uthman's concept of the caliphate

In view of these traditions the view of Uthman was that there was a divinity about the office of the Caliph, and as such the Caliph was responsible to God and not to the people. As such the people had no right to disobey or criticize the Caliph. If the Caliph was just his reward lay with God.

On the other hand if he was unjust his punishment lay with God. Accordingly when a demand for his deposition was made he turned down the demand not because he was fond of power, but because he held that an office which he held on behalf of God had divinity about it, and he was bound to perform his duties to God whatever the odds. According to Uthman his resignation from an office which he held on behalf of God would amount to his refusal to serve God, and that was against the spirit of Islam. He therefore welcomed death to deposition, and that was certainly most noble and elevating on the part of Uthman. Some writers have indulged in the view that at the last moment, Uthman had agreed to be deposed, but that the rebels did not allow him time to announce his deposition. There is no truth in such stories. Uthman stuck to his view to the last, and he preferred to die rather than abandon the post which he held on behalf of God.

As a matter of principle the view that Uthman held about the caliphate was correct and in conformity with the traditions of the Holy Prophet. The people had no right to demand his deposition and he had no right to resign. The concepts of the so-called democracy and the sovereignty of the people were developed later in secular context. Unfortunately most of the writers, Muslims as well as non-Muslims have tried to judge Uthman in the light of concepts which were developed much later, and which are strictly speaking not in consonance with the spirit of Islam. Uthman acted strictly in accordance with the injunctions of Islam, and who rebelled against his authority were rebels against Islam. As a matter of fact all the allegations that had been levelled against Uthman were frivolous and had no substance. Uthman duly considered these allegations and he explained his position in sufficient detail. After such explanation the people had no right to agitate, and rebel against the authority of the State. That was outright sedition. In his book on Uthman, Taha Hussain has taken pains to establish that most of the complaints against Uthman were justified. I am afraid Mr. Taha Hussain has missed the point that under the Islamic constitutional law the authority to determine how far these complaints were justified was the Caliph himself and when he took cognize Ice of these complaints and explained his position publicly that was the end of the matter, and it does not lie within the competence of any writer, howsoever eminent, to sit in judgement over the conduct of Uthman and hold that most of the complaints against him were justified. My submission is that posterity has no right to sit in judgement over the caliphate of Uthman. Uthman acted to the best of his judgement, and we are precluded from finding any fault with what he did. It may be recalled that on the occasion of the expedition to Tabuk when the Holy Prophet gave the tidings of paradise to Uthman he also said that Uthman was not to be judged for anything thereafter. In view of this verdict of the Holy Prophet, it is not open to any Muslim to sit in judgement over what Uthman did as Caliph, and criticize him for any sins of omission or commission. As a matter of fact the revolt against Uthman was not due to any legitimate grievances of the people; it was due to extraneous cause, and was abetted by foreign powers who wanted to subvert Islam from within. The revolt against Uthman was in fact revolt against Islam. Uthman met a martyr's death in defense of Islam

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