

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Politics in the time of Uthman

Political policies of Uthman

Uthman was temperamentally democrat, kind, liberal and generous. He could not therefore maintain the autocratic policies followed by Umar. Uthman relaxed most of the restrictions that had been imposed on the people by Umar. He allowed the Companions to leave Madina at their discretion. He allowed the Arabs to acquire lands in conquered territories. Uthman removed the restrictions on trade. Consequently the Quraish amassed considerable fortune. With such fortune the Quraish acquired large estates in Iraq. That caused some discontentment among the Iraqis. Realizing the importance of agricultural lands, the army raised the demand that the lands in the conquered territories should be distributed among them. Uthman deposed some Governors because of the requirements of the State. Profiting from the kinds nature of Uthman the deposed functionaries collected groups of people round them, and they began to indulge in the criticism of Uthman. Availing of the freedoms that had been allowed under Uthman some movements were launched. e.g. the movement of Ibn Saba which aimed at the subversion of Islam from within.

Under Uthman, the people became economically more prosperous and on the political plane they came to enjoy a larger degree of freedom. No institutions were devised to channelize political activity, and in the absence of such institutions, the pre-Islamic tribal jealousies and rivalries which had been suppressed under Islam erupted once again. The people ceased to see things from the higher Islamic point of view; they came to be prompted by personal and parochial considerations. Differences between the Quraish and the Ansar grew sharper. While the older generation among the Ansar preferred to remain quiet, the younger generation among the Ansar became restive, and they felt dissatisfied at the dominance of the Quraish. Among the Quraish, the differences between the Umayyads and the Hashimite became threatening in character. The Bedouin Arabs chafed at the centralization of power at Madina. With the extension in conquests, population grew, and then on Arabs joined the fold of Islam in large numbers. Differences grew between the Muslims and the non-Muslims, the Arabs and the non-Arabs. With the growth of population and economic prosperity cities grew. The unscrupulous elements made the cities the hot beds of sedition and discontentment. Under Uthman Fustat, Kufa, and Basra became the three principal centers from where revolt was led against Uthman.

In view of the democratic and liberal policies adopted by Uthman the liberties allowed to the people soon degenerated into licence, and such licence became a headache for the State which culminated in the assassination of Uthman. Uthman fell a victim to the tyrannies of his people not because his rule was tyrannical or unjust, but because in advance of his time, he aspired to be kind and liberal in an age suited for an autocratic rule alone. When the caliphate later gave place to a hereditary monarchical order that was a confession of the fact that in that age of autocracy the caliphate system based on the principles of democracy and liberalism could not prosper.

Nothing succeeds like success and nothing fails like failure. As the caliphate of Uthman ended with his assassination we are precluded from concluding that Uthman's policies were successful. The blame for the failure of such policies, however, does not lie on Uthman. He was a well meaning noble hearted Muslim, and he acted in the best interests of Islam and the State. If in spite of his good intentions he failed as a ruler that was due to the fact that he was in advance of the times and was too democrat, too liberal, and too virtuous.

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