

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Reflections of His Caliphate

Disorder in Kufa

When what happened in Kufa is studied analytically we get some idea as to what was at the bottom of the agitation. When Saeed b A1 'Aas was the Governor of Kufa he held a gathering at his house every night which was attended by the principal citizens. At one of the meetings some one expressed the wish that certain lands in Iraq were assigned to Saeed b A1 'Aas so that he could indulge in charity. This was apparently an innocent wish, but it led to violence and exchange of blows. This shows that the people of Kufa were very sensitive in the matter of the ownership of land in conquered territories.

The background of the matter is that the soldiers demanded that like other booty, lands should also be distributed among the soldiers of the conquering army. Umar did not accept the proposal. He laid down that the land left by the non-Muslims should become State property. Uthman followed the policy laid down by Umar. Umar had laid down restrictions on the purchase of such property. Uthman relaxed those restriction, and any one could purchase such land. Most of the land in Iraq had been purchased by the Quraish and that led Saeed b Al 'Aas to observe that Sawad was the garden of the Quraish. That was resented by the people of Kufa and they resorted to agitation. When the matter was reported to Uthman he directed that the ring leaders be sent to Syria. In his book Uthman, Taha Hussain has found fault with this order of Uthman. He has held that the punishment of exile was severer than imprisonment and the cutting of hands and feet. I fail to understand the logic in the argument of Taha Hussain. It is not understood how the sending of certain agitators from one part of the country to another as a corrective measure could be severer than imprisonment and even the cutting of hands and feet. In Syria Amir Muawiyah tried to make these people see the light of reason but he failed. Then they were sent to "Jazira". Abdur Rahman the ruler of Jazira dealt with these people harshly, and they repented. Ashtar, their leader, next went to Madina where he repented before Uthman. Uthman allowed him to return to Kufa. What these people really wanted was that lands in conquered territories should be distributed among the soldiers of the conquering army. When they repented, this implied that they had withdrawn their demand. Thus when in 656 C.E., the people from Kufa marched to Madina to put pressure on Uthman, they had no demand to present; they were merely agitating for the sake of agitation.

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