

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Reflections of His Caliphate

Why failure?

If it is held that no blame rested on Uthman, and his place is among the great men of history, the question that puzzles us is: why in spite of his greatness, the Caliphate of Uthman ended in disaster? The Arabs were individualists and highly democratic. Democracy unless effectively controlled is apt to degenerate into licence. That was exactly the position in the pre-Islamic era of ignorance. The Holy Prophet introduced a new order, "hereunder the democratic urges of the people were effectively controlled by the moral injunctions of Islam, and the exemplary character of the Holy Prophet. After the death of the Holy Prophet, the moral influence of the Holy Prophet was no longer available. The Holy Prophet was succeeded by Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr was known as a kind hearted man' but as Caliph he followed a stern line of action. Even when men like Umar advised that the offer of the tribes not to pay Zakat be accepted, Abu Bakr took the stand that if Zakat was withheld, he would fight. That saved the situation. The apostasy campaigns were over within a year, and the whole of Arabia was won back for Islam. Umar who followed Abu Bakr was already known for his hot temper. He kept the people under strict control, and as such during his caliphate the democratic urges of the people could not degenerate into a licence. Uthman was liberal, soft spoken and kind hearted. Under Uthman there was a relaxation of control, and because of such relaxation, the democratic urges of the people degenerated into licence, and there was a recrudescence of the values of the days of ignorance which Islam had taken pains to suppress.

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