(Imamat of Imam Sajjad (A.S

Imam ‘Ali- ibn al-Husayn was the son of the third Imam and his wife, the queen among women, the daughter of Yazdigird the last Sasanid king of Iran . He was known as “Zaynu ’l-‘A-bidi-n — the prince of the worshippers” and “Sajja-d — the one who prostrates most”.

Imam Zaynu ’l-‘A-bidin was two years old when his grandfather was martyred. In his early teens, he witnessed the situation in which his uncle Imam Hasan lived.

In his late teens and early twenties, he also observed the suppression and persecution under which his father lived during the reign of Mu’a-wiyah. As you have already read in the last lesson, Imam Zaynu ’l-‘A-bidi-n was the only son of Imam Husayn to survive, for his other two brothers ‘Ali Akbar and ‘Ali- Asghar who was a suckling baby were martyred during the event of Karbala. The Imam had also accompanied his father on the journey that terminated fatally in Karbala , but because of severe illness and the inability to carry arms or participate in fighting he was prevented from taking part in the holy war and being martyred.

The Yazidi forces had taken the womenfolk of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) as captives to Kufa and from there to Damascus with the intent of humiliating the holy family and also presenting them as an example for any potential opposition to Yazid’s rule. But Allah had planned it otherwise: the journey of the captives turned, instead, into an opportunity for the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) to present their innocence to the people, convey the message of Husayn and enlighten the masses about the atrocities of the Yazidi regime. The caravan of the captives from Ahlul Bayt exposed the true face of Yazid and his establishment. The most important role played in this awakening of the masses was by Zaynab bint ‘Ali, Husayn’s sister, and Imam Zaynu ’l-‘A-bidi-n.

The speeches of the holy Imam in the city of Kufa, in the court of Ibn Ziya-d (the governor of Kufa), in Damascus and in the court of Yazid himself are excellent examples of how Imam Zaynu ’l-‘A-bidi-n was able to gain victory for Husayn and expose the tyranny of Yazid. And all this was done while he was a prisoner!

Here we shall just present a part from the speech given by Imam Zaynu ’l-‘A-bidi-n in the court of Yazid in response to a speech by a speaker of the establishment who had tried to create hatred in the minds and hearts of the audience against Imam ‘Ali bin Abi Ta-lib and his family.

The Imam went on the pulpit shackled in chains and introduced himself as follows:

“...Those who know me, they know me...And those who do not know, then listen:

I am the son of Mecca and Mina; I am the son of zamzam and Safa; I am the son of the noble one who placed the black stone in the Ka’bah; I am the son of the one who put on the ihram

and did tawaf; I am the son of the one who was taken from Masjidul Haram to Masjidul Aqsa [in mi'raj]; I am the son of one on whom Allah sent revelations; I am the son of Husayn who was killed in Karbala ; I am the son of Muhammad al-Mustafa; I am the son of Fa-timah az-Zahra-'; I am the son of Khadija al-Kubra;

I am the son of the one who was killed and left in a pool of his own blood; I am the son of the one who was left without a shroud and without burial; I am the son of the one who was killed thirsty..."

He soon turned the tide against Yazid; the entire audience started to cry in sympathy for the Imam and his family. It was such speeches that forced Yazid to publicly disown the actions of his own men.

After spending a period in imprisonment, the Imam and the womenfolk of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) were sent with honour to Medina because Yazid wanted to conciliate public opinion.

Jiha-d by Knowledge

The fourth Imam, upon returning to Medina , retired from public life completely and spent his time in worship and in educating his loyal followers. He was in contact with the elite among the Shi'ites such as Abu Hamzah Thuma-li, Abu Kha-lid Ka-buli and the like. The elite disseminated among the Shi'ah the religious sciences they learned from the Imam. The number of such students of Imam reached to 170. In this way Shi'ism spread considerably and showed its effects during the imamate of the fifth Imam.

The high status of knowledge and piety of the companions of Imam Zaynu 'l-'A-bidi-n can be seen from one example of Sa'i-d bin Jubayr. Sa'i-d was arrested by Hajja-j bin Yusuf ath-Thaqafı, the governor of the Umayyads in Iraq and a bitter enemy of Imam 'Ali and the Shi'as. When Sa'i-d was brought to Hajja-j, an interesting conversation took place and we present part of it below:

Hajja-jj: "What is your belief about Abu Bakr and 'Umar—are they in Paradise or Hell?" (Hajja-jj was looking for an excuse to kill Sa'i-d.)

Sa'i-d: "If and when I go to Paradise and see the people over there, then I will be able to say who is there; and if I go to Hell, only then I will know who is over there."

Hajja-jj: "What is your belief about the caliphs?"

Sa'i-d: "I am not responsible for them."

Hajja-jj: "Whom do you like the most among the caliphs?"

Sa'i-d: "The one with whom God is most pleased."

Hajja-jj: "With whom is God most pleased?"

Sa‘i-d: “God knows best.”

Hajja-jj: “How should I kill you.”

Sa‘i-d: “Kill me in whatever way you like, because, by God, you will be treated in the same way on the day of judgment.” Hajja-jj finally ordered the executioner to kill Sa‘i-d. May Allah bless his soul and elevate his ranks among the martyrs. Among the works of the fourth Imam is a book called as-Sahi-fah as-Sajja-diyah. It consists of fifty-seven prayers concerning the most sublime Divine sciences and is known as “The Psalm of the Ahlul Bayt.” Another famous work of the Imam is Risa-latu ‘l-Huqu-q (the Charter of Rights) on socio-ethical rights in fifty different cases. Fortunately, both these works are available in English also.

Attitude of the Rulers

Although Imam Zaynu ’l-‘A-bidi-n refrained from any political activity and dedicated his life to further the knowledge of his followers in religious and spiritual matters, the caliphs were always uneasy with him and kept a close watch on his movements and on those who visited him.

The knowledge and character par excellence of the Imam attracted people of all kinds towards him. This was the main reason that created jealousy in the hearts of the rulers who thought that this attraction to the Imam had the potential of turning a political tide against their establishment. One incident in the life of the Imam clearly shows the hold he had on the hearts and minds of the common people: Once, Hisham, son of caliph ‘Abdu ’l-Malik, entered the Masjidul Haram in Mecca with his entourage for doing tawa-f of the Ka’bah. There were many people doing the tawa-f, but nobody gave any importance to Hisham or gave room for him to get close to the Black Stone. While he was waiting on the perimeter for the crowd to become less so that he may go and kiss the Black Stone, he noticed a sudden movement among the people who starting making way for a person who had just entered the mosque.

That person went straight to the Black Stone and kissed it. It was none other than Imam Zaynu ’l-‘A-bidi-n (a.s.).

Hisham knew him; but, out of jealousy, he asked his entourage: “Who is this?” Farazdaq, the famous and powerful poet of the time, was standing close by. When he heard Hisham’s question filled with jealousy and contempt, he could not control himself and extemporaneously started to recite a poem in praise of the Imam. That piece of poetry is of such high eloquence and clarity that even the modern anthologies of Arabic literature include it in their collections. It is a long poem, but we shall just present a few lines:

He is the one whose footsteps are known to the holy land,

the Ka’bah knows him, so does the sanctuary and the land beyond.
He is the best of all Allah’s servants;
he is the pious, the pure, and the knowledgeable.
The father of this person is the chosen Ahmad[44] ,
may Allah shower blessings on him for ever.
If the Black Stone would know who is kissing it,
it would fall upon his footsteps and kiss the ground.
When the Quraysh see him, they say,
“With his character, nobility reached perfection.”
Your statement “Who is this?” does not diminish him,
the Arabs and others know him whom you refuse to recognise.
His mother is Fatimah, if you do not know him!
And with his grandfather ended the prophethood.

This one incident clearly shows the attitude of the caliphs towards our Imam. And, therefore, it is not surprising that ‘Abdu ‘l-Malik ordered him to be arrested, chained and sent from Medina to Damascus and then again returned to Medina.

It was during the reign of Hisham that the holy Imam was poisoned by Wali-d ibn ‘Abdu ’l-Malik and died in 95 AH/712 CE after thirty-five years of imamate.