Karbala Revitalized the True Islamic Spirit

Events leading to the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and his family have great significance in the history of Islam. As one poet wrote on these events:

Islam is revived after every Kerbala.

In the year 60 Al Hijra (680 AD) Yezid, son of Maaviya, was the Calipha (head of Islamic government) in Damascus, Syria. Yezid's rule as Calipha was far from Islamic. Under Yezid's rule, there was widespread corruption in government as well as in social morals, Islamic tenets, and practices. Imam Hussain refused to accept Yezid as the leader of the Muslims.

In those days, Imam Husain and the rest of the prophet's family resided quietly in Medina, actively seeing visitors only to provide religious guidance to those who sought it.

Yezid directed Walid bin Utba, the governor of Medina to obtain an oath of allegiance from each of the four respected sons of the prophets devoted companions. These four were Abdullah bin Omar, Abdullah bin Zubair, Abdur Rehman bin Abu Bakr and Hussain Bin Ali. Yezid further instructed that Hussain's oath of allegiance was so important that if Walid failed in obtaining it, Hussain would be executed. Coercion and bribes had failed Yezid in gaining his objective.

Imam Hussain was sent for by the Governor in the middle of the night. The Imam took precautions to answer the summons accompanied by a large number of his followers. Imam Hussain argued that the homage to be valid should be done publicly and that he would consider this matter in consultation with his people in the Mosque. Marwan Bin Hakm, an old enemy of the prophet's family, who at one time was exiled from Medina by the prophet advised Walid to have Hussain executed immediately. Walid who was secretly partial to the Imam, granted Imam Hussain his request.

Imam Hussain was offered the Caliphate by the Shiaan-Ahl-e Baiit in Kufa, a city 100 miles south of the present day Baghdad. He was also asked by his followers in Mecca to come and reside in safety. Two days after his meeting with the governor Walid, Imam Hussain with all his family and friends went to Mecca on Rajab 28, 60 AH.

In Mecca Imam Hussain learned that Yezid was planning to execute him during the forthcoming Hudj without respect to the holy event or the sanctity of the city. Imam Husain did not want to tarnish the image of Mecca, the city so revered by all Muslims.

Once in Mecca he was inundated by requests from Shiaan-e-Ahl-e Bait in Kufa and other Muslims also of Kufa to come there and challenge the Caliphate of the corrupt Yazid. Imam

Hussain knew how fickle the Kufans were and how they had let down his father and his brother Imam Hussan. He therefore sent his cousin Muslim Bin Aqeel to assess the situation in Kufa. His letter to the people of Kufa after praising Allah and the prophet and emphasizing the services of his family to Islam and of their nearness to the prophet stated:

"I have sent my messenger to you and call you to the book of Allah and the Sunnah of the prophet, the Sunnah which has now been obliterated and innovations have crept in undermining the basic teachings of Islam. If you listen to me and follow me I will lead you in the right path. May the mercy of Allah and peace be upon you."

Muslim bin Aqeel received an enthusiastic reception in Kufa and some 18,000 persons kissed his hand pledging their support to Imam Hussain. On the strength of this, Muslim wrote to Imam Hussain asking him to come to Kufa.

In the meantime Yazid had been informed about the happenings in Kufa and asked Ibn Ziad, who was the governor of Basra, to go to Kufa and take over the Governorship and ruthlessly suppress the revolt. Within a few days of Ibn Ziad's arrival the Kufans were either bribed or threatened with loss of life and property if they continued to support Imam Hussain. Muslim bin Aqeel decided to start a rebellion against Ibn Ziad but he found himself deserted by the people who first supported him and was beheaded by Ibn Ziad's forces.

Imam Hussain, evaluating the seriousness of Yazid's plot to kill him in Mecca, and receiving the letter from Muslim as to the support he had received from the Kufans, gathered his family and left Mecca a day before the Hadj, 9 Zilhij, 60 AH., for Kufa. On his way to Kufa Imam Hussain received the news about Hazrath Muslim's shahadath. Muslim's shahadath thus became the first in the series of shahadaths at Kerbala some three weeks later near the banks of the Euphrates River.

It is worth noting that Muslim also died thirsty and longing for water, a fate similar to that which befell all seventy-two martyrs at Kerbala. Imam Hussain next received the news of Qays' shahadath in Kufa. Qays was sent by Imam Hussain in advance to Kufa to announce his arrival. Qays who was captured by Ibn Ziad and had refused to reject his allegiance to Imam Hussain as the price for his life was thrown down the roof of Ibn Ziad's palace.

Hussain immediately gathered his followers in a meeting and recited the following verses from the Quran:

Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God.Of them some have completed their vow to the extreme, and some still await.But they have never changed their determination in the least. Sura 23-23 He then blessed those who died and sought mercy of Allah for them and the survivors and informed the gathering that they were marching

towards certain death and those who had accompanied him for worldly reasons should leave and he would not blame them for leaving. Many at this stage left the camp.

Before his shahadath, Hazrath Muslim had written out a message and had given it to a trusted messenger to be delivered to Imam Husain in the event of his death. The messenger carried out his duty. In the message, Muslim told Imam Husain that by the time he read the message, he would have been killed. Muslim prayed for Allah's forgiveness and pleaded with Imam Husain to turn back because all of his friends in Kufa were now too frightened by Yazid's death threat to support him.

Ibn Ziad found out that Hazrath Muslim was with two sons of his in Kufa. He sent his spies to locate them and offered substantial rewards to those who found them. The two young men had lost their way and were wondering outside Kufa when they were caught and imprisoned.

Imam Husain received Hazrath Muslim's message about the same time the two boys were put to death in Kufa. This was the 2nd. day of Muharram 61AH (2nd of October 680 AD) Imam Husain had just reached Kerbala, a place where nobody lived since it was one of the hottest and most barren part of the desert near the banks of the Euphrates. He asked his companions and the family to camp at this place. He summoned the owners of the plain and bought the land from them.

He then gifted the land back to people and informed them that on the 10th day of the month they would find headless corpses on this plain and that they should give these corpses a proper burial and thereafter act as hosts to the many pilgrims who would visit their tombs.

On the third of Muharram Ibn Saad arrived with a force of 4,000 with instructions from Ibn Ziad to blockade the road to the river and cut off the Imam's water supply. When Ibn Ziad had sent a contingent of a thousand men under the command of Hur to keep Imam Hussain under surveillance and to harass his forces, Hur's contingent upon arrival at Kerbala was gasping for water. Imam Hussain personally supervised the supply of water to them. Ibn Saad had orders from Ibn Ziad to blockade the water from reaching Imam Hussain and to force him to go to Kufa. On the 7th of Muharram there was no water in the Imam's camp.

Ibn Ziad impatient at the delay sent Shimr to take over the command from Ibn Saad if he refused to attack the Imam's forces. It was the very same Shimr who was imprisoned by Hazrat Ali and implored Husain to intercede on his behalf. When Imam Husain appealed to his father, Ali told him "do you realize that at one time this very Shimr will be the torturer of you and your family?"

Ibn Saad, anxious to retain his command could not afford to delay an attack on Hussain's forces. When the attack was mounted Imam Hussain sent his brother Hazrath Abbas with

others from his family to ask for a days respite. Imam Hussain's intention in asking for a days delay was to give time to the enemy to deliberate on the crime they were about to commit and give an opportunity to those in his camp who were not totally committed to his cause to leave if they so desired.

Thus on the eve of the 9th of Muharram, Imam Hussain assembled his family and supporters and addressed them in the following words:

"I give praise to Allah who has honored us with the prophet, has taught us the Quran and shown us the way of life which He favors. I know of no worthier companions than mine May Allah reward you all. I believe tomorrow our end will come. I ask you all to leave me alone and seek your safety. I free you all from allegiance to me and I do not hold you back. Night will provide you with cover, use it as a steed".

Soon only some remained in the camp. They spent their time reading the Quran and supplications and preparing for their end. A few in the enemy camp were not indifferent to Hussain's supreme sacrifice and his mission to re-vitalize Islam and bring it back to the guidelines preached by Prophet Muhammad and from which it had wavered.

Some thirty nobles of Kufa came over to lay down their lives with Hussain. Hur who had long regretted his misdemeanor came over with his brother, son, and a slave to fall at the Imam's feet and beg forgiveness for waylaying and obstructing his path and was the first to die in the ensuing battle.

On the morning of Ashura, the 10th. of Muharram, Hussain drew up his army of 72 men who ranged in age from the 70 year old Muslim bin Aswaja to Qasim the 14 year old son of Imam Hassan. Dressed in the cloak of the prophet, perfumed in musk, the Quran raised in his hand, the Imam rode alongside his men addressing them thus:

"Oh Allah, You are my only trust in every calamity, You are my only hope in any hardship, You are the only promise in anxiety and distress in which hearts become weak and action becomes slight, in which one is deserted and forsaken by his friends, and in which enemies take malicious pleasure and rejoice at his misfortunes.

Oh Allah, I submit myself to You, my complaint is to You alone against my enemies and to You alone is my desire and request. Who else other than You can relieve me from grief. You alone are the custodian of every blessing and the Master of every excellence, and the last resort for every desire."

The enemy on hearing these words retorted with vile insults. This incensed the Imam's followers but the Imam did not allow them to take the initiative to start the battle. As the heat of the day grew the Imam rode out time and again to remind Yezid's army, in the name of Allah,

to the heinous crime they were about to commit, of his own relationship to the prophet and the merits of his family and their services to Islam. Each time their only answer was that he should pay homage to Yezid.

As the afternoon approached, the fighting became fierce and only the Imam's family remained. Then one by one they all gave up their lives fighting gallantly and inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy's forces. The first family member to give his life fighting in the name and cause of Islam was Ali Akbar, eighteen year old son of Imam Hussain. His resemblance to the prophet was so striking that the enemy was stunned for a moment. Soon, however, they hemmed him from all sides and he died while his father looked on and prayed to Allah that this sacrifice of his dearest son would be acceptable to him.

Qasim, son of Imam Hassan begged his uncle to let him join the fight and presented him with a letter from his father which was given to him to be opened when he was facing the worst calamity of his life. This letter instructed him that when his uncle Imam Hussain is besieged from all sides and when every true lover of Allah and the holy prophet had died defending the truth, Qasim must sacrifice his life on behalf of his father.

Imam Hussain, remembered that his brother had expressed the wish that Qasim should marry one of his daughters. He therefore celebrated the wedding of Qasim to his daughter Fatima Kubra.

The wedding completed, Qasim went into the fray and died putting to the sword five of the most famous enemy warriors. Hussain helplessly watched the body of his nephew trampled by the enemy cavalry. Aun and Muhammed at the behest of their mother Zainab, the sister of Imam Hussain, then entered the fray giving up their young lives with the other martyrs of the day. ,They were only nine and ten years of age.

Abbas, Hussain's brother was cut down when he made a dash to the river to bring water to the thirsty children in the Imam's camp. It should be noted that Abbas reached the river, filled his canteen and was returning when he died. As the historians reported, even though all of the warriors on Imam Hussain's side were thirsty for three days, they fought valiantly and left an example of moral integrity unmatched in annals of history. When Abbas reached the river, he lifted the water in his palms and thinking of the thirsty children back at the camp dropped it without drinking, demonstrating remarkable self control.

Imam Hussain was now left alone at the camp. In answer to his sister's call he went inside the camp and was told that his youngest son, Ali Asgher, a six month old baby was dying of thirst as his mother could no longer nurse him. The Imam took the baby in his arms and went out reciting the Quran. Addressing the enemy forces he said that surely they had no quarrel with

this baby who had done them no harm and that he might be given water to sustain its life. Ibn Saad anxious to ensure that his army was not moved by this sight ordered Hurmela to fire on the child. Hurmela's arrow pierced through the throat of Ali Asghar killing him instantly. Wounded, exhausted from thirst, his body spattered by the blood of his baby son, Imam Hussain returned to his camp. The Imam was quite certain that his baby son's plight would not move his enemy to pity but he wanted to demonstrate to the world that up to the last moment he had done everything possible to appeal to the better nature of his enemy but to little effect. The Imam then bade farewell to his sister Zainab, the companion of his childhood, warning her of the trials and sufferings which would befall them after his death. He entrusted her with the care of the women and children and particularly of his four year old daughter, Sakina, who was so attached to him. Ali Zain-ul-Abideen, his only surviving son was lying on his sick bed unable to join the battle. Imam Hussain went to his bedside to appoint him as his successor entrusting him to carry on the light of Muhammad to mankind. The young man staggered to his feet and wanted to accompany the Imam in his last fight. Hussain restrained and reminded him of his sacred duties and the blessed progeny that were destined to be his issue-the future Imams of Ahl-e Bait.

All through the day Imam Hussain had gathered the bodies of his companions and laid them carefully side by side ready for burial. He now returned to this task and there a body of men led by Shimr found him and attacked him and hacked his body to the ground while the women and children looked on. Abdullah, the youngest son of Imam Hassan threw himself across the path of the soldiers attacking his uncle and met his death. Finally Sinan bin Ans bin Amr severed the head from the body of the mutilated Imam.

Thereafter Hussain's camp was put to the fire and the women and children of his household arrested, chained, and marched to Ibn Ziads durbar in Kufa. From Kufa they were taken to Yazid's durbar in Damascus. En route where ever this cavalcade camped, Zainab addressed the people who had gathered to see the prisoners of war. These people were not aware that the prisoners were the Ahl-e Bait-e Rasool. Hazrath Zainab explained their contribution to the Islamic cause and the events at Kerbala in her addresses. It was Zaineb who started these gatherings which are continuing on till today and are called Majlis in India and Pakistan. The Imam Hussain by his sacrifice had revitalized the true Islamic spirit. Hazrath Zainab and Imam Zain-ul Abiddin carried the task of explaining the true Islamic teachings and the Sunnah to the Muslims in the years that followed Kerbala.

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