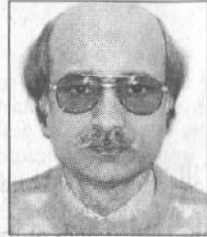


The historical Ummah — IV

THINKING ALOUD



RAZI AZMI

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"rightly-guided caliph" was stabbed to death while praying in a mosque in Kufa in 661.

A continuation of the struggle for power led to the murder of Hazrat Ali's son, Hazrat Hussain, at Karbala. The forces of Yazid I "cut off the head of Hazrat Hussain. His body was trampled under the

hoofs of Umayyad cavalry with savage ferocity and subjected to every ignominy". The resulting revolts in Mecca and Medina were put down by a 12,000-strong force. After subduing Medina, the force proceeded to Mecca, "occupied all the surrounding heights, and from there bombarded the city with their mangonels. The siege lasted for 64 days".

Upon the abdication of Caliph Muawiyah II in 684, another struggle for power ensued, from which Marwan I emerged victorious. He sent a force to capture Medina, but was unsuccessful. Reneging on his earlier commitment, Marwan nominated his son Abdul Malik to succeed him, followed by his brother Abdul Aziz. Malik's succession was contested by his cousin Amr bin Saeed, whom Malik removed "by inviting him to a feast and then killing him".

At the turn of the seventh century, there were three caliphs in the Muslim world, namely, Abdul Malik (in Syria and Egypt), Abdullah bin Zubair (Hejaz and Basra) and Mukhtar (Kufa and Mosul). In this triangular contest resulting in numerous battles and countless deaths, many prominent heads rolled. These included Shammar and Umar bin Saad, responsible for the murder of Imam Hussain. "Their heads were cut off and sent to Zainul Abidin, the son of Imam Hussain." Also killed was Ubaidullah bin Ziyad, commander of the Syrian force, whose "head was cut off, and sent to Kufa where it was displayed in the audience hall where Ubaidullah had at one time displayed the head of Hazrat Hussain."

After Mukhtar was defeated, Abdul Malik sent Hajjaj bin Yusuf to overthrow Abdullah bin Zubair in Mecca, which "was stormed with fire and sword." Abdullah died fighting in 692. Thus concluded this particular conflict, which had lasted 12 years, with victory for Abdul Malik, whose four sons succeeded him as caliphs, but not without the spilling of more blood.

Tariq bin Ziyad and Musa bin Nusair, the conquerors of Spain, and Muhammad bin Qasim, the victor of Sindh, fell victim to the renewed strife. All three were recalled in disgrace and subjected to torture, Muhammad bin Qasim dying as a result. Under the rule of Hisham, the last of the four brothers, there was an uprising in Kufa in 740, led by Zaid, the grandson of Hazrat Hussain. The revolt failed, "Zaid was arrested, his head was cut off and sent to Hisham in Damascus."

In Turkey, Bayazid began his rule in 1389 by murdering his brother Yaqub. After seizing the Turkish city of Sivas in 1400, Amir Timur ordered "all male citizens who had defended the city [to be] buried alive". Bayazid proceeded to avenge the massacre, but was defeated and died in captivity. A war of succession ensued among his five sons. It culminated in the death of three and lasted 11 years, during which one of the contenders sought the military assistance of Christian Byzantium. Later, Selim I dethroned his father Bayazid II in 1512 and settled the accession issue by putting to death both his brothers and five nephews.

The end of Muslim rule in Spain is attributed to internal conflict. "Relations between Granada and Morocco deteriorated. The king of Morocco sent a force under his brother Abu Said to capture Gibraltar. Yusuf III, Amir of Granada, with the aid of the Christians defeated the forces of Morocco. Abu Said was taken captive and the Sultan of Morocco made no attempt to secure his release. Yusuf III decided to exploit this position to his advantage and interfere in the affairs of Morocco. He released Abu Said and promised to help him in his fight against his brother, the king of Morocco".

Assisted by a Granadian force, Abu Said invaded Morocco, defeated his brother and became the Sultan of Morocco. "Heretofore the Marinids of Morocco

THE PRECEDING THREE ARTICLES HAVE revealed the dismal state of the contemporary Ummah. This concluding piece will attempt to show that the popular notion of a glorious past is far from accurate. The scale and ferocity of the rivalries, power struggles and blood-letting in past Muslim societies is stupefying. Some of the history makes for chilling reading. (Unless otherwise mentioned, quotations that follow are from the *History of Islam* by Prof Masud-ul-Hasan, published by Islamic Publications, Lahore, 1998, two volumes.)

The murder of the third "rightly-guided caliph", Hazrat Usman, in the year 656 is described thus: "The rebels from various parts of the country besieged Medina. Hazrat Usman was besieged in his house. The besiegers scaled the walls, entered the room where Hazrat Usman was reading the Quran and killed him". The ringleader of the group was Muhammad bin Abu Bakr, son of Hazrat Abu Bakr, brother of Hazrat Aisha and a stepson of Hazrat Ali, by virtue of the latter marrying his widowed mother. The 84-year old Usman "breathed his last on the afternoon of Friday, [but] the power of the rebels was so great that Usman's body lay unburied until Saturday night when he was buried in his blood-stained clothes" (www.allaahuakbar.net).

After Hazrat Ali succeeded him as caliph, "Hazrat Talha and Zubair, two eminent companions [of the prophet [PBUH]] were the first to separate from Ali. The rebels were able to muster a considerable force at Mecca. Basra was occupied by the rebels. Hazrat Ali marched with his force from Kufa to Basra. The forces of the two sides met outside Basra. In the battle Hazrat Ayesha took the field personally [against Hazrat Ali]. As many as 10,000 Muslims died from both sides". The situation in Hijaz became so troubled that Hazrat Ali moved his capital to Iraq. But his woes continued and the last

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Assisted by a Granadian force, Abu Saïd invaded Morocco, defeated his brother and became the Sultan of Morocco. "Heretofore the Marinids of Morocco

had interfered in the affairs of Granada; now the roles were reversed for the first time". Yusuf III's son Muhammad VIII had three stints as Amir, for he was deposed by uprisings and the machinations of Muhammad VI, who sought the assistance of Christian-ruled Castille. Finally, he was overthrown by his nephew, Muhammad X, and imprisoned. The end of Muslim rule in Spain in 1492 was thus hastened by internecine warfare, which included a revolt by Boabdil against his father when Christian forces "stood at the gates of Granada".

In seventeenth century India, Emperor Jahangir had his son Khusrav's eyes gouged out as punishment for a premature bid for the throne and Shah Jehan had all potential male contenders put to death to secure his position. Aurangzeb, renowned for his Islamic piety, had no scruples in killing his three brothers to wrest the Mughal throne. He even had the severed head of Dara Shikoh delivered to their distraught father, the imprisoned former emperor Shah Jehan, as pay-back for his having favoured Dara as his successor. Between them, these three Great Mughal emperors destroyed other independent Muslim entities in India, most notably the states of Bijapur and Golconda in the south, which were already weakened by the same rivalries and wars which characterised Muslim states elsewhere.

The above is an incomplete but representative survey of a rather murky past. Neither the past nor the present reveals a harmonious Ummah. Indeed, the only harmony appears to be between the Ummah's past and its present.

This is the concluding article in a series of four. The third article appeared on March 17, 2005. The author, a freelance writer, may be contacted at raziazmi@hotmail.com

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