

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir's (A.S.) Era

By: Ayatullah al-Uzma Sayyid Ali Khamene'i

During the life of Imam Baqir (as), the same line continued. The situation improved to some extent during this era. During this period too the emphasis was mainly laid on the Islamic, religious teachings. First of all, the previous heedlessness and disrespect of the people to the Progeny of the holy Prophet was not observed. When Imam Baqir (as) enters the mosque, groups of the people always encircle him to listen to his teachings.

A narrator says: "I saw Imam Baqir (as) surrounded by the people from Khurasan and other places in the Medina Mosque." This shows that the people across the world of Islam became interested in the Progeny of the Prophet (S) in this period. There is another tradition saying: "He [Imam Baqir] was surrounded by a group of people from Khurasan. The Imam was discussing the lawful and unlawful issues with them."

The great scholars of the time used to study in his classes. When a renowned personality like Ikramah, the student of Ibn Abbas, decides to come to Imam Baqir (as) to listen to his traditions, he is trembling. Ikramah, addressing the Imam says, I have attended the classes of great people like Ibn Abbas and listened to their tradition, but I never trembled as it happens to me when I come to you. In reply, the Imam very clearly says: Woe unto you, the little bondman of the Damascenes. You are in front of a member of a House where Allah has permitted the remembrance of His name in it (using part of a verse in the holy Quran)."¹

Also a great jurisprudent (faqih) and scholar of the time, Abu Hanifah, too comes to Imam Baqir (as) to learn Islamic, religious teachings. Many other renowned religious scholars are the students of the Imam as well. Imam Baqir's scientific will and testament becomes famous in every nook and cranny, introducing him as Baqir al-Ulum (the Expounder of Sciences).

Therefore, the social conditions and people's attitude towards the infallible Imams changed considerably during the time of Imam Baqir (as). As a result, Imam Baqir's political movement gained more momentum. For instance, Imam Sajjad (as) did not take any harsh stance against Abdul Malik in order not to provide them with any excuse to oppose him. Of course, whenever Abdul Malik wrote a letter to Imam Sajjad, he answered it firmly, logically and convincingly.

However, there are no direct, hostile remarks in his letters, whereas the situation is different with regard to Imam Baqir (as). In fact, the movement of Imam Baqir (as) is so strong that Hisham ibn Abdul Malik is frightened and tries to control the Imam by taking him to Damascus (erstwhile Shaam). Of course, Imam Sajjad (as) too was taken to Damascus in shackles and handcuffs after his Imamate began in the aftermath of the Karbala episode, but the situation was different and Imam Sajjad (as) always reacted carefully. In comparison, Imam Baqir's (as) reactions were harsher.

In a number of traditions, which have been quoted in the discussions of Imam Baqir (as) with his Companions, he has called on them to set up the government, Caliphate, and Imamate and even heralded the future victory. One of the traditions have been quoted in the Bihar-ul-Anwar: "A great number of people had assembled in the residence of His Holiness Abi Ja'far (Imam Baqir (as)). An old man leaning on a stick, saluted, and expressed his affectionate feelings to the Imam and sat on his side, saying: "Swear by God, I cordially love have affectionate towards you and also love the people who love you. But this love does not stem from any greed for material gains. I am also hostile to your enemies and hate them.

Likewise, my deliverance from your enemies is not based on my personal grudge against them. Swear by God, I consider lawful what you have announced lawful, and deem unlawful what you have ordained unlawful. I am waiting for your rule. Are you optimistic that I will see the days of your victory? I am waiting for your "Amr" (government); that is, I am waiting for the arrival of your rule."²

The words "Amr" and "Amrokum" in the literature of this period - whether those attributed to the infallible Imams or those to their opponents - refer to the "Government". For instance, Harun in a letter to his son Mamun writes: "Swear by God if you challenge me over this Amr'....". In this statement, "Amr" refers to the "caliphate and Imamate". Hence, we are waiting for your "amr" means: "we are waiting for your caliphate." The question of that old man is: Are you optimistic that I will see the days when you are in power? In reply to this question, Abu Ja'far asked the old man to sit on his side and then said: "O, the old man, the same question was asked from Ali ibn al-Hussein (Imam Sajjad (as))."

However, we have not seen this question in the traditions attributed to Imam Sajjad (as). Therefore, if Imam Sajjad (as) had made this statement in a big gathering, it would have reached us and others as well. Most probably, what Imam Sajjad (as) had said in secret,

Imam Baqir (as) said in the public¹. The answer of Imam Baqir (as) to the question of the old man was: "Given your characteristics and morale, if you die, you will join the holy Prophet, Imam Ali, Imam Hassan, Imam Husayn, and Imam Sajjad (as); you will be relieved, your soul will attain salvation, your eyes will see the true light, and you will be relieved with felicitation and flowers of the angels of God. If you remain alive, you will witness a period which will bring comfort to you when you will be with us in the high positions."³

Such statements are found in the remarks of Imam Baqir (as), indicating his attempts to raise hope in the hearts of the Shiites: "If you die, you will be with the holy Prophet and the friends of God, and if you remain alive, you will be with us."

In another tradition cited in the book "Kafil", the Imam determines a time for the uprising: "The Almighty had ordained the year 70 hijra for the establishment of an Alawi government. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn (as) outraged the Almighty Who postponed it until 140 hijra. We informed you about this moratorium, you exposed it and therefore God has not told us any other specific time. When God decides, He generates or degenerates and the Written Book lies with Him."

The year 140 marks the final stages of Imam Sadiq's (as) life. Before I come across this tradition, through studying the trend of the lives of the infallible Imams, I had realized that the way Imam Sajjad (as) and Imam Baqir (as) had worked, the path had been paved for the establishment of a government during the time of Imam Sadiq (as). Imam Sadiq was martyred in 148 hijra; God's promise had indicated that the Alawi government would be established in 140.

Before 140, there was the crucial and effective incident of 135 hijra when Mansur came to power. If Mansur had not come to power or the issue of the Abbasside had not come to the fore, the Divine providence had ordained the establishment of the divine, Islamic government in 140. Whether the infallible Imams were aware of the Divine providence or they themselves too were hopeful of setting up the government, is another issue that requires a separate discussion.

Right now I am discussing the situation during the time of Imam Baqir (as). He stressed that the establishment of the divine government had been ordained for the year 140 hijra. He also said that after he had confided the date in his companions, they exposed it, and as a result the Almighty God postponed it. Raising such hopes in the people and making such promises happened during the time of Imam Baqir (as).

Of course, it requires hours to discuss the life of Imam Baqir (as) in order to give a clear picture of his life. I have already discussed this issue in details. Although not fierce armed struggle, overall, the issue of political struggle is more transparent in Imam Baqir's (as) life. Zaid ibn Ali, a brother of his holiness, consults him about launching an uprising.

He says: do not rise; Zaid obeys him. Those who argue that Zaid did not listen to his brother's advise, are wrong. Zaid consulted Imam Sadiq (as) about an uprising. The Imam not only did not stop him, on the contrary, encouraged him. After the martyrdom of Zaid, Imam Sadiq (as) said: "I wish I were among the companions of Zaid." Hence, Zaid must never be disrespected.

Imam Baqir (as) never approved an armed movement, but political struggle clearly existed in his career, while during the time of Imam Sajjad (as) there was no trace of an open struggle.

When Imam Baqir (as) approaches the end of his life, he continues his struggle with his recommendation for mourning ceremonies for his martyrdom in the holy land of "Minal" near Mecca. In his will and testament, he asked his followers to mourn his death in Mina for ten years. This was the continuation of the same struggle.

What was the aim of mourning Imam Baqir's death in Mina? In the life of the infallible Imams, it is only mourning the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (as), which has emphatically been recommended in many authentic traditions. In addition to the case of Imam Husayn (as), I only remember that Imam Ridha (as) convened his family members to mourn and cry for his departure from Medina to Khurasan (this action of Imam Ridha (as) occurred before his martyrdom, and actually was a political, meaningful, goal-oriented action).

Further to the mourning for Imam Husayn (as) and Imam Ridha (as), only in case of Imam Baqir (as) he recommends crying and mourning his martyrdom. He even earmarks 800 drachmas of his wealth for mourning his death in Mena. The land of Mena is different from other holy lands like Arafat, Mash'ar and even Mecca.

In Mecca, people are dispersed and everybody is preoccupied with his own rituals. In Arafat, the rituals take only half a day to perform. When the pilgrims arrive in Arafat in the morning, they are tired, and in the afternoon they are in a hurry to leave the site towards Mash'ar. In Mash'ar, they stay only for few hours overnight; it is a passage towards Mena, while in Mena they stay for three consecutive days.

Very few people go to Mecca during the daytime and come back in the evening while staying

in Mena for three days. In fact thousands of Moslems from all over the world are assembled in Mena for three days. Therefore, it is a suitable place for propagation. Any message that is to reach the world of Islam should be imparted there, particularly during those days when such mass media as radio, television, and newspaper did not exist. When a group mourn a grandson of the holy Prophet (S), people become curious to know the reason.

Normally, people do not mourn every dead for several years. But when the people mourn over the death of someone for several consecutive years, a number of questions come to the fore: Had he been oppressed? Had he been killed? Who had oppressed him? Why had he been oppressed? Several similar questions come to the fore. This is the very political struggle, which is a calculated, precise move.

An interesting point in Imam Baqir's life attracted my attention, that is, he uses the same arguments the Progeny of the Prophet used during the first half of the first century hijra about the Caliphate.

The summary of this argument is: "The Arabs boast to non-Arabs about the Prophet, the Quraish boast to non-Quraish about the Prophet (as the holy Prophet (S) belongs to Quraish tribe). If this boasting is right, we are the closest people to the Prophet, we are superior to others, but we were isolated and others consider themselves the heir to the throne. If the Prophet is a source for the Quraish to boast to others, if he is a source for the Arabs to boast to non-Arabs, therefore, it is a source for our superiority to others."

This argument had been again and again forwarded by the Ahl-ul-Bayt (the Progeny of the holy Prophet) in the first century. Imam Baqir (as) too in 95 and 114 hijra, which is the era of his Imamate, pronounces these words. It is a debate aimed at the Caliphate, which is a meaningful move.

References:

1. Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 46, P.257, Tradition 59
2. Bihar-ul-Anwar, Vol. 46, P.362, Tradition 3
3. Ibid.