

The Islamic Battle of Jamal (Camel) at Basra

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Ayesha the daughter of the first Caliph Abu Bakr, and the widow of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.), was in Makka for the pilgrimage when third Caliph Uthman was killed. She had always expected either Talha or Zubayr to succeed him and when she heard of Imam Ali's (A.S.) appointment as Caliph, she was very upset. And said, 'By God! Uthman was innocent, I will
avenge his blood.'

Both Talha & Zubayr were brothers-in-law of Ayesha. Her youngest sister was the wife of Talha, who was also a cousin of her father. Her eldest sister was a wife of Zubayr, whose son
Abdullah was adopted by Ayesha.

Ayesha was a jealous woman. Now she declared herself as the avenger of the murder of
Uthman and prepared to wage war against Imam Ali (A.S.), whom she had always hated. She managed to recruit the support of the powerful clan of Bani Umayyah, to whom Uthman had belonged. The ex-governors of Uthman, who had been replaced by Imam Ali (A.S.), also
joined her.

JamalYala the ex-governor of Yemen carried off to Makka all the treasure from Yemen when he was deposed. Amounting to sixty thousand Dinars, which he made over to Ayesha along with six hundred camels, one of which was a rarity, a big-sized, well bred animal, valued at 200
gold pieces. It was named Al-Askar and was specially presented for the use of Ayesha. Talha and Zubayr also joined her, in spite of their oath of allegiance to Imam Ali (A.S.). A large number of Arabs were also paid to enlist in the army, whose fathers and brothers had been killed by Imam Ali (A.S.) in defending the Prophet's (S.A.W.) cause on the occasion of various
wars in his time. Many a discontented Arab flocked under the Standard.

The preparations of war having been completed, Ayesha's army proceeded to Basra. Before leaving, she had asked Umme Salma, a faithful widow of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.), to accompany her. Umme Salma had indignantly refused, reminding Ayesha that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) had said that Imam Ali (A.S.) was his successor and whoever disobeyed him, disobeyed the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) himself. She also reminded her of the time when he had addressed all his wives saying that the dogs of Hawab would bark at one of his wives, who would be part of a rebellious mob. She then warned Ayesha not to be fooled by the words of Talha and Zubayr who would only entangle her in wrong deeds. This advice had a sobering effect on Ayesha, who almost gave up her plan. However, her adopted son, Abdallah bin

Zubayr, convinced her to go ahead.

Ayesha mounted on a litter on the camel al-Askar, and marched from Makka at the head of 1,000 men. On her right was Talha and on her left, Zubayr. On their way many more joined them, swelling their numbers to 3,000.

On the way to Basra, the rebel army received news that Imam Ali (A.S.) had come out of Madina in their pursuit. They decided to leave the main road and proceed to Basra through a different route. When they passed through the valley of Hawab the dogs of the village surrounded Ayesha's camel, barking loudly. She was immediately worried and asked for the name of the place. When she was told it was Hawab, she was shocked and she despairingly cried, "Alas! Alas! I am the wretched woman of Hawab. The Prophet of Allah had already warned me against this."

She got off her camel and refused to go any further. Talha and Zubayr tried to convince her that the place was not Hawab and even brought 50 witnesses to testify to this lie, but in vain. This is said to be the first occasion of false evidence given publicly since the dawn of Islam. Finally, they raised a cry that Imam Ali (A.S.) was approaching, and Ayesha, struck with terror, quickly remounted and the march was resumed.

The army reached Basra and camped in the suburbs. Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr began talks with the leading citizens of Basra, trying to get their support for their cause. In this they failed and were subjected to ridicule.

Finally, some of them entered the city and during the congregational prayers, they treacherously captured Imam Ali's (A.S.) governor, Uthman bin Huneif, after killing 40 of his guards. Fighting broke out in the city and many of Imam Ali's (A.S.) supporters were killed before Ayesha gained control of Basra. The governor, Uthman, suffered the indignity of having his eyebrows, moustache and beard plucked out, hair by hair, before being turned out of the city.

Meanwhile, Imam Ali (A.S.) had received information about Ayesha's plans from Umme Salma, and news of the disturbances in Makka and Basra also came through.

Imam Ali (A.S.) made immediate plans to march towards Basra but could only raise 900 men with difficulty. This was because the people were reluctant to fight Ayesha, who was considered to be the Mother of the Faithful by virtue of being the widow of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). Also, Muawiya had succeeded in making people think that Imam Ali (A.S.) was somehow involved in the murder of Uthman.

In Kufa, Imam Hasan (A.S.) raised 9,000 men, and other units arrived as well, all joining Imam Ali (A.S.) at his camp at Zhi-Q'ar. Meanwhile, Uthman bin Huneif arrived with fresh news from

Basra. Imam Ali (A.S.) smiled and said to him that he had left them as an old man but had returned as a beardless youth.

Imam Ali (A.S.) wrote letters to Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, warning them against the unwise steps they had taken, but his words were ignored. Finally he marched to Basra at the head of 20,000 men.

Ayesha's forces numbered 30,000 but they were mostly raw recruits, while Imam Ali's (A.S.) army was full of battle veterans.

In Basra, the sight of Imam Ali's (A.S.) men in battle formation filled Ayesha and her comrades with terror. Imam Ali (A.S.) talked at length with Talha and Zubayr, negotiating for peace. He reminded them of the words of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) regarding his authority, which they both admitted they had heard. Zubayr was ashamed of his deeds and left the scene but Talha remained doubtful. Ayesha was furious at the conduct of the two and ordered a raid at nighttime to end the chance of peace.

The next morning Ayesha mounted her camel al-Askar and urged her troops to prepare for battle. Thus began the unfortunate Battle of Jamal (Camel), where Muslims fought each other for the first time. Although outnumbered, Imam Ali (A.S.) and his soldiers were too skilled to be defeated. Soon victory began to incline towards Imam Ali (A.S.). Talha was wounded and later died. Ayesha's camel was brought down and Imam Ali (A.S.) ordered her brother Muhammad bin Abu Bakr to take care of Ayesha.

After that, the battle was soon over, and Imam Ali (A.S.) declared a general amnesty for all the rebels.

Ayesha's plans had come to nothing and 10,000 men lay dead as a result of her jealousy. In this battle Imam Ali (A.S.) restrained his men from taking any war booty and all property found on the battle ground was gathered in the mosque of Basra, from where the owners could claim their possessions