**Tawwabun Uprising**

The Tawwābūn Uprising (Arabic: ثَورَة التَّوّابين, penitents uprising), is the first of Shi'i uprisings which took place after the Battle of 'Ashura to respond to the increasing demand for vengeance for Imam al-Husayn's (a) blood in the year 65/684. This uprising was joined by Muslims and all those devoted to the Ahl al-Bayt (a) to confront the army of Syria in 'Ayn al-Warda under the leadership of Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuza'i. Contents

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Ambitions

A group of Shi'as who had invited Imam al-Husayn (a) to Kufa, promising to give him their allegiance and support his cause, but failed to do so, strongly regretted their decision in betraying Imam al-Husayn (a) after the Battle of 'Ashura' and decided to compensate their mistake in the past. After numerous sessions, they concluded that the only way to wash off this shame was to join hands to fight in vengeance of Imam al-Husayn (a)'s blood and being killed on this endeavor of killing his murderers.[1] Development

A couple of months after the Battle of Karbala, approximately one hundred Shi'as gathered in the house of one of Kufa's most prominent and pious men called Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuza'i. Citing verse 54 of Quran 2[2] which is about Israelite and that their repentance for worshiping the calf was to kill themselves. Later, Sulayman addressed his fellow fighters by saying; "We promised the Prophet's household to support them, but we didn't. We waited to see the result of the event, until the Prophet's son was killed. Now God will not be satisfied with us unless we fight his murderers. Sharpen your swords and gather your horses and your strength until you are called to gather."[3]

After this speech, other known Shi'a figures such as Musayyib b. Najaba al-Fazarai, Rifa'a b. Shaddad al-Bajali, 'Abd Allah b. Wal al-Taymi, and 'Abd Allah b. Sa'd al-Azdi also spoke. Finally Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuza'i was chosen as the leader of the rise.[4] Goals

According to speeches and sessions recorded from the Tawwabun in history, their uprising was aimed at:

Taking vengeance on the murderers of Imam al-Husayn (a).

Handing over the rule to the Ahl al-Bayt (a).

Formation of Army

The Tawwabun secretly held weekly sessions on the development of their uprising in the year 61/680-681 where they discussed issues from gathering forces to the time of rise in the presence of Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuza'i. They secretly gathered manpower and arms from Kufa and the tribes surrounding Kufa to prepare for their fight.[5]

Upon establishing the army, Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuza'i sent letters in the year 64/683-684 to Sa'd b. Hudhayfa who was the leader of Shi'as in al-Mada'in and Muthanna b. Makhrama al-'Abdi who was a well-known Shi'a from Basra in an effort to invite them to the uprising. The Shi'as of Basra and al-Mada'in promised him that they will take part in their uprising.[6] Beginning of the Uprising

Historians suggest that the outbreak of uprising was on Rabi' I 1 of the year 65/October 19, 684 when Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuza'i began summoning his men. Their army of several thousands marched towards a place called Nukhayla while chanting their slogan which was; "Ya la-tharat al-Husayn" (Arabic: یا لثارات الحسین, O, avengers of al-Husayn). However, Sulayman b. Surad was disappointed when a large group of Shi'as especially the people of Basra and al-Mada'in dishonored their promise to take part in the rise. It is said that of the sixteen thousand men who had promised to show up, only four thousand were present in Nukhayla.[7]

It is said that al-Mukhtar al-Thaqafi believed that Sulayman b. Surad lacked both political and military skills required for such an uprising, and as a result, many Shi'a troops from Sulayman's army began to desert him in large numbers.[8]

On Rabi' I 5/October 23, the Tawwabun army moved from Nukhayla towards Damascus. When the army reached Karbala, they got off their horses and paid an emotional visit to Imam al-Husayn's (a) burial place.[9] Sulayman b. Surad said, "Oh Lord, witness that we are followers of Husayn's religion and path. We are the enemies of his murderers."[10] The Tawwabun prayed that since they had missed the chance to be martyred along with Imam al-Husayn (a), God would not deny them another chance to be martyred after al-Husayn (a).[11] Beginning of the Battle

Before the army of Syria arrived, the Tawwabun stopped at 'Ayn al-Warda and took five days to rest. On the day of the conflict, Sulayman b. Surad organized the fights, announced his advices, and introduced his successors. He said:

"If I am killed, the leader of the army would be Musayyib b. Najaba. After him, Abd 'Allah b. Sa'd b. Nufayl shall take the leadership of the army. After his death, 'Abd Allah b. Wal and Rifa'a b. Shaddad are going to be the leaders of the Tawwabun's battle."[12]

On the Jumada I 25, 65/January 10, 685, the two armies confronted in a fierce battle.[13] The army of Syria was led by 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad.[14] Result of the Battle

After four days of battle, many of the Tawwabun were slaughtered. Their leaders were killed one by one and the few remaining soldiers were surrounded. They had no choice but to retreat under the leadership of Rifa'a b. Shaddad al-Bajali. On their way back, the Tawwabun were met by the Shi'as of Basra and Mada'in who had come to help them. They exclaimed their grievances and went back to their cities. When the defeated Tawwabun army reached Kufa, al-Mukhtar al-Thaqafi, who was incarcerated, praised Sulayman b. Surad and the martyrs of their war and vowed to take vengeance on their killers, and rise to avenge Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom.[15]

In his book The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam Sayyid Husayn Muhammad Ja'fri believes that the Tawwabun were evidently defeated by the Umayyads army, however, in reality they managed to form the first ever integrated Shi'a organization, which was influenced by Imam al-Husayn's (a) thought and manner in order to serve the Shi'a community.[16]

Notes

1. Ibn Aʿtham, Kitāb al-futūḥ, vol. 6, p. 205, 206; Ibn Saʿd, al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā, vol. 6, p. 25.
2. And [recall] when Moses said to his people, ‘O my people! You have indeed wronged yourselves by taking up the Calf [for worship]. Now turn penitently to your Maker, and slay [the guilty among] your folks. That will be better for you with your Maker.’ Then He turned to you clemently. Indeed He is the All-clement, the All-merciful. (Quran 2:54)
3. Majlisī, Biḥār al-anwār, vol. 45, p. 355.
4. Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh, vol. 4, p. 160.
5. Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-umam wa l-mulūk, vol. 4, p. 430-431.
6. Majlisī, Biḥār al-anwār, vol. 45, p. 355, 356; Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-umam wa l-mulūk, vol. 4, p. 429.
7. Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya wa l-nihāya, vol. 8, p. 276-277.
8. Balādhurī, Ansāb al-ashrāf, vol. 6, p. 367-368.
9. Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh, vol. 4, p. 178.
10. Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-umam wa l-mulūk, vol. 4, p. 456-457.
11. Abū Mikhnaf, Maqtal al-Ḥusayn, p. 291.
12. Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya wa l-nihāya, vol. 8, p. 278.
13. Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh, vol. 4, p. 182.
14. Balādhurī, Ansāb al-ashrāf, vol. 6, p. 370.
15. Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh, vol. 4, p. 184-186; Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya wa l-nihāya, vol. 8, p. 279-280.
16. Jaʿfarī, Tashayyuʿ dar masīr-i tārīkh, p. 232-233.

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Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī, Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar. Al-Bidāya wa l-nihāya. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1408 AH.

Ibn Saʿd, Muḥammad b. Manīʿ al-Baṣrī. Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā. Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, [n.d].

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