

THE IDEAL CALIPHATE

After the demise of the Holy Prophet, the question of the appointment of his successor arose in order to protect Islam and to promote its cause and also to administer the territories that were included in the Islamic State. Thus the Caliphate involved both religious as well as temporal functions.

Question of Succession

It is highly significant that the Quran is silent and even the Holy Prophet did not leave any definite instructions nor did he lay down any particular procedure on the appointment of his successor. To some this may appear rather disappointing but there is every reason to suppose that this omission was deliberate and quite in consonance with the elastic and universal character of Islam. As Islam is meant for all times and all climes, it could not afford to bind its followers to a hard and rigid procedure in this matter. The Prophet, knowing very well that the mode of succession would differ from time to time and from people to people, deliberately abstained from laying down any particular rules on the procedure regarding this question, thus leaving it to be decided by the people themselves. However, the modes of succession adopted by the first four Caliphs can serve as precedents to the Muslims who can follow any one of them, suiting their environments.

Appointment of the First Caliph

As soon as the people of Medina (Ansar) heard about the death of the Holy Prophet, they assembled together in order to elect a Caliph from among themselves. When news of this assembly reached the prominent companions of the Holy Prophet, Abu Bakr, Omar and Abu Obaida, scenting the danger from such an election, hastened to the spot. Abu Bakr argued the point with the Ansar that if they elected the Caliph from among themselves, no recognition would be given to such an election by all the tribes of Arabia, and particularly by the Quraysh who occupied the most important and prominent position in the country. When he quoted the well-known Hadis (tradition) of the Holy Prophet, "That the Imams shall be chosen

from among the Quraysh," the Ansar were convinced of the futility of their claims to the Caliphate, and agreed with Abu Bakr. Meanwhile, Omar, reminding the people that Abu Bakr was the most revered and was held in the greatest esteem by the Holy Prophet, took oath of allegiance to him as the First Caliph in Islam. And when Abu Ubaida followed suit, the whole assembly present there took oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr. On the following day, the whole public took oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr as the First Caliph in Islam.

Appointment of the Second Caliph

At his final illness, Abu Bakr thought of appointing his successor and, after due consideration, put the name of Omar before the prominent companions of the Holy Prophet. When there was unanimity regarding his proposal, he got a will made out nominating Omar as his successor. Thereafter, he convened a general assembly of the people to announce his will. When Abu Bakr announced the name of Omar as his successor, it was accepted with great zeal and acclamation by the public assembled there and all the people took oath of allegiance for Omar.

Appointment of the Third Caliph

When the Caliph Omar was wounded by a Christian and felt that there was no hope of his survival, he thought of settling the question of succession. In order to solve this knotty problem, he nominated a Council of the six most important companions of the Prophet (Ali, Osman, Talha, Zubair, Sad bin Waqqas, and Abdur Rahman bin Auf) and instructed them to elect the Caliph from among themselves within the next three days. He also associated the name of his son Abdullah bin Omar, but only in a consultative capacity, that is, Abdullah was not allowed to contest the election to the Caliphate but was only authorized to cast his vote in case there was equal division of votes. In accordance with the instructions of the Caliph Omar, the Council started functioning immediately. In order to facilitate the selection of the Caliph, Abdur Rahman bin Auf suggested that some of the members of the Council should withdraw their candidature. Thereupon, three of them namely

Talha, Zubair and Sad bin Waqqas withdrew from the contest, leaving the remaining three, namely, Ali, Osman and Abdur Rahman in the field. Next Abdur Rahman bin Auf suggested that any one of them who, at that points, would withdraw his candidature would be empowered to make the choice of the Caliph. On hearing this proposal, both Osman and Ali kept quiet, and Abdur Rahman bin Auf withdrew his candidature and thus undertook upon himself to make th selection of the third Caliph. However, Abdur Rahman bin Auf, in order to satisfy himself, spent three days and three nights in sounding out the opinion of the people, and when he realized that the majority was in favour of Osman, he dedided in favour of the latter. The decision of Abdur Rahman bin Auf was accepted by the people without any exception including Ali.

Election of the Fourth Caliph

When Osman was martyred by the insurgents in Medina, the question of his successor arose immediately. The very insurgents who were the murderers of Osman proposed the name of Ali for this exalted office and approached him to accept it. Taking into consideration the awkward situation in which he was placed, Ali declined the offer in the first instance, but when he was requested to accept the offer by the prominent companions he had no other alternative. The election of Ali was a foregone conclusion after Osman, as on the occasion of the election of the third Caliph, there were only two candidates left (Osman and Ali) in whose favour all other candidates had withdrawn. It was now the turn of Ali for this exalted office as he was the youngest companion of the Prophet. In fact, the election of Ali as the fourth Caliph was made by all those who were present in Medina and an oath of allegiance was taken for him by the general public throughout the Islamic State.

Election System in Islam

From the above modes of succession, it can be safely concluded that the element of election was essential with regard to the appointment of the Head of the Islamic State. The principle of hereditary succession was scrupulously avoided by Abu Bakr and particularly by Omar who had excluded his own son from seeking election while

conceding him the right of vote in case of equal division of the votes of the Shura (Council). Secondly, only prominent companions could stand for election to the exalted office of the Caliphate.

Qualifications of Voters

As for those who were to elect the Caliph it was necessary for them to possess certain qualifications and it was on this score that Mawardi, the great Jurist, layed down standards for them: literacy, intelligence and irreproachable character. Also, if a certain country has not sufficiently developed literacy, then the voters may be divided into two categories, namely, those who would actually vote and those who would simply ratify the election made by the literate voters. Therefore it may be concluded that the widening of enfranchisement depended upon the expansion of education in a country. Property qualification was not recognized in an Islamic State.

Bait (Oath of Allegiance)

After the election of the Caliph, every adult Muslim citizen was required to take the oath of allegiance to the Caliph for the following reasons: firstly, all of them had not voted at the time of election, and secondly, all the citizens must be bound by an oath of allegiance so that they would always obey the orders of the Caliph and cooperate with him in matters of State. Once the oath of allegiance was taken by the believers, it could not be broken unless the Caliph himself flagrantly violated the laws of Shariat (Divine law). The oath of allegiance was purely a contractual affair between the Caliph and the citizens. The latter surrendered all their rights to the person of the Caliph so that the latter could regulate the affairs of the State in accordance with divine laws. If the Caliph acted contrary to these laws, the contract would be no longer binding and the citizens were exonerated from their oath of allegiance. In fact, unconditional obedience is only due to God and to no other authority. Since the real electors were originally the prominent Companions of the Prophet, greater importance was attached to the oath of allegiance of the citizens. No other state had granted so much importance to an individual as the Islamic State.

Inaugural Address

After the election of the Caliph and the oath of allegiance taken by the people, it was customary for the Caliph to deliver his inaugural address in which he would lay down his policy. The inaugural address of the First Caliph in Islam is significant in this respect. He said, "Oh people, since you have elected me as your Caliph, I ask you to obey me and cooperate with me. Help me if I am in the right and correct me if I am in the wrong. The weak among you is strong in my eyes as I have got to vindicate his right; and the strong among you is weak in my eyes as I have got to order him to respect the right of the weak." This inaugural address shows at once that the obedience and cooperation from the believers were not unconditional. If the Caliph acted in accordance with the Laws of Shariat (Divine law), he could demand obedience, otherwise, the believers were at liberty to disobey him. The Caliph was not the master but the servant of the State and as such he was open to correction. He could be criticized even by an ordinary person in the street and his chief duty was to maintain justice between the strong and the weak.

Civil List

After his election, the Caliph Abu Bakr wended his way to the market, carrying a bundle of cloth on his shoulders. On the way he met Omar and Abu Obaida who objected to his taking to his private business as he was the servant of the State. Thereupon the Caliph raised the question of the maintenance of his family and himself. In order to solve this problem, a meeting of the Companions was held and it was decided that the Caliph be granted an allowance just enough to maintain him and his family, having in view the standard of living of an average Arab family. Beyond the fixed allowance, the Caliph was not entitled to take anything from the Baitul-Mal, i.e., the public treasury. The same was the case with the second and the fourth Caliphs, but the third Caliph being very rich did not take any allowance from the Baitul-Mal. It may be concluded, therefore that the Head of the State could be given maintenance allowance from the public treasury if he had no private means to maintain himself and his family. The allowance was to be fixed by the members of the Shura or Council taking into consideration the standard of living of

the people. The pious Caliphs known as Khulafai Rashidin were very punctilious about their duties as they felt themselves doubly responsible to God as well as to the people. Once a little honey was needed by Omar as medicine, but he would not take the amount to purchase it from the Baitul-Mal (Central Treasury) unless he obtained the sanction of the Shura (Council).

Rights and Privileges of the Caliph

The word "Caliph" means the successor of the Prophet in matters other than the divine revelation which ceased with the demise of the Prophet. Naturally the position of the Caliph was most exalted and honourable and he was to be held in the highest esteem by the believers. It was his special privilege and unique distinction to lead the congregational prayers of the believers and deliver Khutba (address) on Fridays and during Idain (a bi-annual festival). In the provinces, the governors performed this important duty in the Caliph's behalf. In his absence, it became customary for them to mention his name in the Khutba after the glorification and praise of God Almighty and the Holy Prophet. Thus the mention of the name of the Caliph in the Khutba assured great importance and constituted one of the insignia of sovereignty of the Caliph. The Caliph was the successor of the Prophet, was the keeper of the Prophet's Ring which was used as the Seal on all the official documents and correspondence, and was also the custodian of the Prophet's mantle which he used to don on ceremonial occasions. He was also to hold the Prophet's staff. All these things were his valuable possessions and later on constituted as his insignia of sovereignty.

Duties and Responsibilities of the Caliph

Being the successor of the Prophet, his first duty was to protect Islam and to promote its cause. In this capacity, he had to lead the congregational prayers of the believers and deliver Khutba on Fridays and during the Idain. He entrusted this important duty in the Provinces either to the Governor, or the Military Commanders, or the Revenue Collectors, or the Kadis, in accordance with the degree of piety attained by them. He appointed Muftis (Jurists) in order to help the Kadis (Judges) and the public in connection with the

interpretation of Islamic Law. He also appointed impartial Kadis to dispense justice in accordance with Islamic precepts. He also appointed preachers in order to preach Islam among the non-Muslims and new converts.

In order to fulfill the chief objective of the State, "To order people to do good and to help them abstain from committing wrong," he also appointed Muhtasibs, i.e., censors of public morals, whose main duty was to see whether religious obligations were being fulfilled by the believers. The Muhtasib was empowered to punish the delinquents on the spot. The Caliph also sent the message of Islam in foreign countries through these preachers; and if any obstacles were put in the way of these preachers, he wage Jihad (Holy War) in the way of God. He declared Jihad against the non-believers and took full responsibility over this act. He also made peace and enter into defensive alliances with foreign powers. Besides religious duties, he was also responsible for the following functions:

1. guarding of the frontiers of the State;
2. collection of Taxes in accordance with the injunctions of the Shariat Law (Divine Law);
3. maintenance of Law and Order; and
4. dispensation of Justice.

Double Responsibility of the Caliph

The early Caliphate being based on divine Law, the Caliph was doubly responsible to God as well as to the people. As he was to execute the Divine Laws, he felt responsible to God even for the minutest details in the administration. Being a firm believer in the Hereafter, he felt that he would be held responsible to God for all his faults of commission and omission. As such, there was no distinction between the private and public life of the Caliph. Being elected by the people, he was also responsible to them. The people could keep a check over his actions and the moments they felt that he was not managing the affairs in accordance with the dictates of Shariat Law (Divine Law), he was to be criticized and checked. The people were also empowered to depose him in case he did not mend his ways. This double responsibility felt by the Head of an Islamic State, both to God and to the people, is not to be found in any modern State. The pious Caliphs were very careful of their duties and would not exceed the limits set on them by Shariat (Divine Law).

Caliph and the Executive

The Caliph was the highest Executive Head of the State, and it was his chief duty to enforce the execution of all orders either issued by him individually or in consultation with his Advisory Council. In accordance with the Quranic injunctions, "God enjoins upon the Prophet to take counsel in matters of State" and "That their administrative affairs are carried on through counsel," there existed a Majlis i Shura, i.e., Council of all the prominent Companions of the Holy Prophet. The appointment of this Council was made by the Caliph himself from among the most important companions of the Prophet, the only criteria for their appointment being their intimate knowledge of Divine Law (Shariat Law). Several members of this Council were also assigned certain portfolios.

Many questions pertaining to the affairs of the State, such as fixation of the salary of the soldiers, the establishment of the various departments, the grant of right to foreigners to trade in Muslim lands and the fixation of taxes to be levied on them, declaration of Holy War and making peace with the enemy, etc., were decided by the Caliph in consultation with the members of this Advisory Council. This Council always met in the Prophet's mosque. Daily reports from districts and provinces received by the Caliph were presented before this Council which decides on them.

With regard to the more important offices, selection was made openly in the consultative assembly and only those persons were appointed to such posts who were selected by the house. Apart from the consultative assembly, every citizen had a voice in state administration. Provincial Governors and district officials were often appointed with the approval of the subjects and if any Governor or any other high official could not keep the people satisfied, he was removed in case complaints made against him were found to be correct.

A special office was established for investigation into the complaints that reached the Caliph against the officers of the State and Muhammad bin Maslamah Ansari, a leading Companion of the Prophet, was appointed to this post. When a complaint came against an official, he was deputized to investigate the charge and took evidence in public assemblies.

Sometimes a commission consisting of a number of persons was

sent to make the inquiry. Several instances of the formation of commissions are recorded in history. Sometimes the official concerned was called to Medina and questioned personally. A general announcement was made that on the occasion of Hajj, when all the Governors and high officials were present, people could make their complaints, if any. On such occasions, the Caliph himself examined the complaints and punished the defaulters there and then.

Selections were made on no other consideration than merit, character and the services rendered to the cause of Islam, with the result that the officials appointed during this period were all persons of great capability and sterling character. In order to ensure honesty and efficiency in administration, high salaries were given to the officials so that they might not fall into temptation.