

MUHAMMAD IBN AL-QASIM

A Study of His Family Background and Personality

Students of early Indo-Muslim history are sufficiently familiar with the name of the famous Arab general, Muhammad b. al-Qasim, and his conquest of North Western India in the early years of the second decade of the eighth century A.D. He is popularly known as the Conqueror of Sind which is now a province of Pakistan but under the Arab administration included the whole of West Pakistan except some parts of the North West Frontier Province. This conquest of Sind by Muhammad and the subsequent Arab rule in Sind for nearly three centuries is a fascinating chapter of Indo-Muslim history in which Muhammad b. al-Qasim stands out as a hero. Usually 'heroes' tend to become legendary as subsequent generations mix up facts with fiction to depict a more impressive picture of their personalities. Sometimes only the hero's name is exalted for want of other particulars about him which somehow are relegated to oblivion. Muhammad b. al-Qasim is not an exception to such treatment. As Islam was, for the first time, introduced into this sub-continent following his conquest of Sind, Muhammad b. al-Qasim is the sentimental hero of the Muslims of this sub-continent but most of them hardly know anything about him beyond his name. On the other hand, the non-Muslim writers have side-tracked facts in their accounts of Muhammad. Indeed, most of the historians have mixed up facts and fiction in their appraisal of this historical personality. But in Muhammad b. al-Qasim's case, facts are stranger than fiction. An attempt is, therefore, made here to explore facts—facts about his family background and career in order to set his personality in a better historical perspective.

Family Background :

Muhammad belonged to the family of Abu 'Aqil which, in turn belonged to the main tribe of Banu *Thaqif* and hence the name of Muhammad as 'Muhammad ibn al-Qasim al-*Thaqafiy*', i. e. belonging to the tribe of *Thaqif*. The genealogy of *Thaqif*,¹ the progenitor of the *Thaqafites*,

1. *Thaqif* b. Munabbih b. Bakr b. Hawazan b. Mansur b. 'Ikrimah b. Khasafah b. Qais 'Ailan b. Mudar b. Nizar b. Ma'add b. 'Adanan. Confirm Ibn Hazm p. 255 ; Ibn Duraid I/182-83 ; al-Sam'ani الثقفى ; Ibn Hisham I/49 ; al-Marzubani pp. 337-38, Sharh Nahj. II/392.

shows that he belonged to the sub-branch of Qais-'Ailan of the stock of the 'Adnani Arabs, the pure stock of the Northern Arabs as compared with the Qahtanids i.e. the Southerners. Al-Marzubani has pointed out this fact of the noble ancestry of the *Thaqafites*, which was responsible for their great prestige.² To the 'Adnani stock also belonged the Quraishites including the Umayyids. The *Thaqafites* had, therefore, a common ancestry with the ruling house of the Umayyids and this advantage contributed to their source of strength. Indeed, the *Thaqafites* played an important part in the government during the Umayyid rule.

The beautiful green oasis town of al-Ta'if had been the main habitat of the *Thaqafites* from where they spread all over Arabia and in other lands.³ Thus, partly this very environment was responsible for producing many prominent personalities among them. Both of the two main sub-branches of the *Thaqafites*-*Banu Jusham* and *Banu 'Auf*-produced able administrators and commanders who were associated with the conquest of North Western India.

(i) To *Banu Jusham's* prominent family of *Banu Hutait* belonged 'Uthman who under his governorship of Bahrain and 'Uman during the caliphate of 'Umar, sent naval expeditions against the port of Daibul, Thana and Bharoach on the West coast of India in 15 A. H. (636 A.D.).⁴ To them also belonged, Abd-al-Rahman, the Governor of Kufa under the reign of Mu'awiyah.⁵ Muhammad b. Mus'ab b. 'Abd-al-Rahman, who was one of Muhammad b. al-Qasim's commanders in Sind⁶ and also conquered Sadusan or Sehwan for him,⁷ was most probably a grandson of this 'Abd-al-Rahman, the Governor of Kufa.

(ii) *Banu 'Auf* produced still greater personalities. Their first distinguished member was Mu'attib whom the Prophet had sent to the *Thaqafites* to call them to Islam but who was killed by them.⁸ His grandson was Abu 'Aqil whose descendants, being particularly prominent, came to be distinguished as *Al Abi-'Aqil* - 'the Family of Abi 'Aqil'. To this family belonged Muhammad b. al-Qasim.

The star of *Al Abi-'Aqil* rose high with the rise of al-Hajjaj, a school teacher of al-Ta'if,⁹ whom Caliph Abd-al-Malik (685-705 A.D.) first appointed in 72 A.H., as a military commander to fight against his adver-

2. al-Marzubani, p.338.

3. al-Sam'ani, see under (الشافعي)

4. Cf. the author's article entitled "The Probable Date of the First Arab Expeditions to India," *Islamic Culture*, July 1946, Hyd. Dn.

5. Ibn Duraid 11-183 & Ibn Hazm p. 254.

6. *Vide*, Fathenama, pp. 155, 174, 180 & 192 al-Baladhuri, Europe ed. p. 458 Egypt ed. p. 425.

7. Cf. al-Baladhuri p. 438 and Fathenama, p. 146.

8. Ibn Hazm, p. 255.

9. Ibn Duraid, II 187.

sary Ibn Zubair; thereafter he was appointed as Governor of Medina in 74 A. H., and subsequently as the Viceroy of Iraq in 75 A. H.¹⁰ which post he held for 20 years till his death in 95 A.H. During this long period of his office, al-Hajjaj patronised many of his *Thaqafite* relatives and appointed them to various highly important posts but none succeeded like Muhammad b. al-Qasim,¹¹ the youngest of them all.

Muhammad's Early Home Life :—

In all probability, Muhammad was born by about 75 A.H. at al-Ta'if. His mother's name was Habibat al-'Uzma¹² and his father was al-Qasim¹³ who was a cousin of al-Hajjaj (being the son of al-Hajjaj's uncle Muhammad b. al-Hakam). Muhammad b. al-Qasim was, therefore, the grandson of al-Hajjaj's uncle Muhammad b. al-Hakam b. 'Abi-'Aqil, and the son of his cousin al-Qasim but not exactly al-Hajjaj's nephew (uncle's son).¹⁴ The complete genealogy of Muhammad on his father's

10. *Vide* al-Tabari, Vol. II. pp. 829, 854 and 863.

11. Muhammad led the armies to Sind in 92 A.H. and conquered it in 93 A.H. By this time, he was a lad of 17 years (*vide infra* p. 15) and hence the year of his birth would be 75 A.H. The members of Abu 'Aqil's family were obviously living at al-Ta'if, the old home of the *Thaqafites*, from whom al-Hajjaj was recruited in 72 A.H. Their prominent members, including Muhammad's parents, may possibly have left al-Ta'if only after 75 A.H. when al-Hajjaj became the Viceroy of Iraq and was able to fix up his relatives in various provincial posts away from al-Ta'if.

12. So mentioned in al-Hajjaj's letter to Muhammad b. al-Qasim when the latter had defeated Dahar in Sind. (*Vide* Fathenama, p. 192).

13. Thus his proper name would be 'Muhammad bin al-Qasim' (Muhammad son of al-Qasim). However, the early histories of Sind and India written in Persian, following Fathenama the earliest of them all, wrote his name in the Persian form as "محمد قاسم" (Muhammad-e-Qasim) i. e. Muhammad (son) of Qasim.

The manuscripts generally did not carry the *zer-e-idafat*, and the readers missing its significance mistook the two names (of the son and the father) for one compound name of the Conqueror of Sind as "محمد قاسم". Thus, many early writ-

ers have erroneously given Muhammad's personal name as "Muhammad Qasim" which is obviously incorrect.

14. This clarification is important in view of the fact that a great deal of confusion has been caused by the Arabic phrase "ابن عم" which has been used in the

histories written in Arabic describing Muhammad's relationship to al-Hajjaj. "ابن عم" literally means "uncle's son" but broadly, it also means, in Arabic

usage, 'any descendant of one's uncle.' The Persian word "عمزاده" (correctly

used in Fathenama pp. 100 & 213), at best can be the corresponding word for "ابن عم" in the latter sense of the term. But occasionally Fathenama (pp. 94 &

106) followed by M'asumi (p. 21), describes Muhammad as "پسر عم حجاج" 'son of Hajjaj's uncle' which is a misleading phrase. For, Muhammad b. al-

Qasim was actually the grandson of al-Hajjaj's uncle Muhammad b. al-Hakam b. 'Abi 'Aqil, and the son of al-Hajjaj's cousin, al-Qasim.

side can now be traced as follows: "Muhammad b. al-Qasim b. Muhammad b. al-Hakam b. Abi 'Aqil b. Mas'ud b. 'Amir b. Mu'attib b. Malik b. Ka'ab b. 'Amr b. Sa'd. 'Auf b. *Thaqif* b. Munabbih b. Bakr b. Hawazin b. Mansur b. 'Ikrimah b. Khasafah b. Qais 'Ailan b. Mudar b. Nizar b. Ma'add b. 'Adnan."

Muhammad had two brothers namely Sulb and al-Hajjaj. Sulb is mentioned in one of al-Hajjaj's (the Viceroy of Iraq) letters to Muhammad recorded in *Fathenama*,¹⁵ wherein al-Hajjaj's statement indicates that Sulb was a man of reputation. Probably he was older than Muhammad. al-Hajjaj, Muhammad's second brother was obviously younger than he as he emerges into prominence about twenty-five years after Muhammad's death. He was a lieutenant of al-Muzni who commanded the state forces against Zaid b. 'Ali, in Safar, 122 A.H. Jan. 740 A.D., and was dispatched with Zaid's head to Yusuf b. 'Umar, the Viceroy of Iraq.¹⁶

The duration of Muhammad's home life with his parents appears to be approximately 15 years, from 75 A.H. 90 to 91 A.H.. By 90 to 91 A.H. he seems to have entered service and left for abroad once for all. Little is known about this early period of his life, from infancy to late adolescence, but, in all probability, it was spent partly at al-Ta'if where he was born, partly at al-Basrah where his father al-Qasim was appointed as Governor by al-Hajjaj,¹⁷ and partly at Wasit the capital of al-Hajjaj who liked him immensely.

Considering the circumstances of his parents, it can be safely presumed that all care was taken to educate young Muhammad. The very name of his mother, 'Habibat-al-'Uzma', i.e. 'Habiba the Great', suggests that she was an eminent lady who must have taken good care of her son. Muhammad's father al-Qasim was not an intellectual man and, indeed, as compared with the usually shrewd and intelligent *Thaqafites* he was rather a simpleton.¹⁸ All the same, he was a well-informed man,¹⁹ and capable enough to have served as the Governor of al-Basrah. Al-Ta'if was an ideal place for the infancy and early child-hood of Muhammad. That al-Hajjaj himself was a teacher at al-Ta'if just three years before Muhammad's birth, shows that it was an educationally advanced town. At al-Basrah, where his father was appointed as the Governor, young Muhammad had within his reach immense educational opportunities as it was a great intellectual, cultural, and military centre of the Muslim

15. See *Fathenama*, p. 192.

16. al-Tabari, II-1171.

17. Cf. Ibn Hazm, p. 256.

18. Cf. Muhammad b. Habib who in his *Kitab-al-Muhabbar* (p. 380) mentions him ('al-Qasim b. Muhammad b. al-Hakam b. Abi Aqil'), as one of the 'simpletons among the *Thaqafites*' ('حمقى ثقيف').

19. al-Bukhari in his *al-Tarikh al-Kabir* (Vol. IV, p. 157) has mentioned his riwayat from Muawiyah.