

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Islamic Actions and Social Mandates

Slavery

When Islam appeared on the world stage, the world economy was based on slavery. Islam was the first religion to raise its voice against slavery. Among the early converts to Islam, many were slaves. Indeed one of the reasons for the hostility of the Quraish against Islam was that they saw in Islam a hostile force to slavery on which the economy of Mecca was based.

When Umar became the Caliph of Islam, he took particular measures to eliminate the evils of slavery as far as possible. He took a very bold step when he declared that no Arab could be a slave. Arabia was thus the first country in the world, which under the impact of Islam abolished slavery. During the apostasy wars many Arabs had been taken captive and made slaves. Umar emancipated all such slaves.

Umar also decreed that slave women who had borne a child to her master stood emancipated.

The Holy Quran laid down:

If you see good in them (slaves), make agreement with them."

Umar implemented this injunction and laid down that a slave could make an agreement with the master that he would pay so much within the specified period to secure his freedom. Anas had a slave Sirin by name. The slave wanted to enter into an agreement with his master, but Anas refused. When the matter was reported to Umar, he made Anas enter into an agreement with his slave.

In the matter of stipends allowed by the state, Umar made no distinction between the master and the slave. The slaves were given the stipends on the same scale as their masters.

Umar issued orders that slaves could not be separated from their kindred. Under these orders the child was not to be separated from its mother. If there were two brothers it was obligatory that both of them should be purchased by one master.

Umar was considerate that when some very highly placed person was taken captive, he should be ransomed and not kept as a slave. When in Syria the daughter of the emperor Heraclius was taken captive, she was returned to her father. When in the battle of Babylon, Armanusa the daughter of Maqauqas was taken captive she was returned to her father.

In order to raise the status of slaves, Umar enjoined that the master should generally take meals with their slaves. Occasionally Umar invited slaves to dine with him. Umar said:

"The curse of God be upon those who feel ashamed to sit to meals with slaves."

Umar laid down that if a Muslim slave gave protection to a non-Muslim such protection was to be honoured like the protection given by any other Muslim.

Umar took pains to provide facilities to slaves to rise to position of importance in the State. During the caliphate of Umar Ikramah who came to be regarded as an Imam of Hadith was a slave. Nafi who was the teacher of Imam Malik was a slave. There were many other slaves who became eminent during the caliphate of Umar.

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