

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

Satires And Lamoons

During the days of ignorance, satires and lampoons were the common device to discredit one's adversaries. Poets were hired to write satires and lampoons ridiculing one's rivals and adversaries. As poetry was a popular pastime, such satires would get swift publicity and led to many disputes and much mischief.

Umar felt that such poems which ridiculed and caricatured certain sections of the society and were abusive and divisive in character were repugnant in Islam which stood for social solidarity. Umar declared the writing of satires a criminal offence and warned the poets that if they indulged in such unsocial activities they would be punished.

Tamim and Najashi were two poets. Tamim complained before Umar that Najashi had satirised him. Umar wanted the verse objected to be quoted. The verse provided:

"If God were to hate the mean and the ignoble;

Then may Banu Ajlal hate Tamim bin Muqbal."

Tamim argued that the implication of the verse was that he (Tamim) was mean and ignoble and that his tribe should hate him. Umar had other verses of the poem read as well and came to the conclusion that these verses were defamatory in character and amounted to a satire. Najashi was accordingly punished.

Hutayya was a well known satirist of the age. He ridiculed Zabarqan bin Badr and the later lodged a complaint against Hutayya in the court of Umar. Zabarqan was asked to quote the verse to which he objected. The verse ran:

"Do not aspire to do great deeds,

For in the matter of sustenance you are a burden on others."

Umar summoned Hassan bin Sabit the poet laureate of the time to give evidence whether this verse amounted to a satire. Hassan said that the verse implied that Zabarqan depended for his sustenance on others and was not capable of doing anything good. That amounted to a satire.

Hutayya explained that satirising was his profession, indeed so much so that he satirised his own mother and even himself. Umar wanted to know how he had satirised his mother. He said that he had composed the following verse about his mother:

"Begone, be away from me

May God save the world from you."

Umar then wanted to know how he had satirised himself and he quoted the following verse:

"Today I will not say anything against any one,

For I have seen my own ugly face in the mirror."

Umar gave him some money and warned him that he should not satirise any one again.

In the time of the Holy Prophet when they saw that all their weapons against the Prophet and Islam had failed they hired poets to satirise the Holy Prophet. In retaliation the Holy Prophet permitted Hassan bin Sabit to satirise the Quraish. Hassan's poems remained in currency even after the Quraish had embraced Islam. When Umar became the Caliph he ordered that such poems should no longer be recited as these had become out of context and revived memories of ancient enmity.

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Source : Alim.org-Umar bin al-Khattab History