Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Political and Governmental Actions

Umar's Criteria For Appointment As Governors

In order to maintain the integrity of administration, Umar laid down very difficult criteria for the selection of candidates for appointment as Governors. Some accounts have come down to us which show how scrupulous was Umar in choosing his Governors.

It is related that once Umar decided to appoint a Governor. The Governor-designate came to Umar to get his orders of appointment. Umar asked his Secretary to draft the order. As the order was being drafted a younger son of Umar came and sat in his lap. Umar caressed the child. Thereupon the Companion said, "Amir ul Muminin your children come to you freely, but my children do not dare to come near me". Thereupon Umar said, "If your own children are afraid of you, the people will be still more afraid of you. The oppressed will hesitate to bring forward their complaints to you. As such you are not fit to be a Governor, and the orders about your appointment as Governor stand cancelled."

Once Umar thought of appointing a Companion as Governor. Before the orders of appointment were issued that Companion called on Umar and solicited appointment as a Governor. Umar said:

"I was going to appoint you as a Governor on my own account, but now that you have yourself asked for this appointment, I think you are not fit for the office. As you have asked for the office I fear you will use it as an office of profit and I cannot allow that. I would appoint only such men who regard such office as a burden to he entrusted to them in the name of Allah."

The appointment of Governor for Kufa became a matter of great headache for Umar. If he appointed a man who was harsh and stern the people complained against him. If he appointed a soft hearted man, the people took advantage of his leniency. Umar wanted his comrades to advise him regarding the selection of a right man for the office of the Governor of Kufa. One man rose up to say that he could suggest a man who would be the fittest person for the job: Umar enquired who was he, and the man said,, Abdullah bin Umar" Umar said, "May God curse you, you want that I should expose myself to the criticism that I have appointed my son to a high office. That can never be".

Around Umar there were such prominent persons as Usman Ali, Zubair, Talha and others. Umar did not offer them any office. Some one asked Umar why did he not appoint such prominent persons as Governors. Umar said, "These notables occupy a high status because of their virtues and other qualities. I do not appoint them as Governors lest for any lapse they may lose the prominence they enjoy at present."

Once the post of the Governor of Hems fell vacant, and Umar thought of offering it to Ibn Abbas. Umar called Ibn Abbas and said, "I want to appoint you as the Governor of Hems, but I have one misgiving." "What is that", asked Ibn Abhas. Umar said, "My fear is that some time you would be apt to think that you are related to the Holy Prophet, and would come to regard yourself above the law." Ibn Abbas said, "When you have such a misgiving I would not accept the job." Umar then said, "Please advise me what sort of man should I appoint." Ibn Abbas said, "Appoint a man who is good, and about whom you have no misgiving".

Some one asked Umar, "What is your criterion for selecting a man for appointment as a Governor?" Umar said, "I want a man who when he is among men should look like a chief although he is not a chief, and when he is a chief, be should look as if he is one of them."