

Plunder (Ghanîmah) in the Hadis

(1) Is plunder compatible with religion and piety? We have seen that the Koran itself says yes . But it appears that some objection was raised against this view as early as the Prophet s own life-time. The Prophet himself met this objection in a somewhat longish hadîs. We find him declaring in favour of the Koranic view by contrasting Allah s dispensation regarding plunder in the epoch of former prophets with that in his own. The same issue had been raised when the followers of a former prophet had amassed a goodly amount of loot which Allah apparently disapproved. So a fire approached the spoils to devour them , but stopped just short of touching it. The prophet of aforesaid time was clever enough to guess the reason for such strange behaviour on the part of the divine fire. And he told his followers, One of you must be guilty of concealing a part of the spoil. So come forward and touch my hand by way swearing fealty to me. One or two hands stuck the prophet s hand and, true enough, on questioning they disgorged gold equal in volume to the head of a cow . So the whole plunder was put together and Allah s fire promptly lapped it up. To the prophet of Islam, the meaning of this parable was unmistakable. As he reasoned:

The spoils of war were not made lawful for any people before us. This is because Allah saw our weakness and humility and made them lawful for us (Sahih Muslim, No. 4327).

(2) It should be clear from the foregoing episode that the Hadis makes its own addition to the Koranic doctrine of ghanîmah. The mujâhid must despoil the infidel as a matter of course, but he should not misappropriate any portion of the loot. The plunder is property of the Islamic state so long as it is not doled out to each according to his performance, the Prophet s (or the Sultan s) holy one-fifth being the pick of the basket. Keeping the plunder for oneself without reference to the commander is a grievous sin. As the Prophet puts it in another hadîs:

Fight against those who disbelieve in Allah. Make a holy war; do not embezzle the spoils (Sahih Muslim, No. 4294).

In fact, embezzlement of spoils is one of the deadliest sins in Islam. This comes out in a number of ahâdîs. A slave of the Prophet was killed in jihâd against the Jews of Khaibar (AD 628). When people started greeting him as a martyr, the Prophet cried out:

Nay, not so. By Him in Whose hand is the life of Muhammad, the small garment he stole on the day of Khaibar but which did not fall to his lot is burning like the Fire (of Hell) on him (Sahih Muslim, No. 210).

(3) I have said that this doctrine of embezzlement or misappropriation of the spoils is an addition to the Koranic doctrine of plunder made by the Prophet on his own. But it must be understood that what the Hadis has added to the Koran is but a logical corollary. Plunder, this side of religion, is a vocation natural to robbers. If robbers go on a plundering spree, it is only the iron discipline of the leader that prevents them from falling out among themselves for a larger share of the gain. Now if one were to invoke divine sanction for the plunder, one must similarly make provision for divine disapproval against its misappropriation. The two things hang together, and what the Hadis has added is only a legitimate extension of the Koran.

(4) The Hadis has made many other additions to the doctrine of ghanîmah. It would be tedious to enumerate all of them, but one important addition, equally logical, merits mentioning. The Messenger of Allah allotted two shares from the spoils to the horseman and one share to the footman (Sahih Muslim,

Nos. 4358-59). The learned Pakistani translator of Imam Muslim refers to the vast Islamic literature which expounds this tenet and he himself breaks into lyricism in extolling such beauties of the Hadis.

(5) A far more important extension made by the Hadis to the doctrine of ghanîmah is the inclusion of the whole world as the Mussalman's rightful field of spoliation - so to say. The Koran speaks of the other gain which the Muslims have not yet been able to achieve (K 48/21). The Hadis tells us that the whole of earth belongs to Allah and His Apostle. Because such ahâdîs touch the issue of Islamising the whole of humanity this hadîs merits quoting in extenso. But first of all a preliminary word.

The reader should know that early Islam became prosperous by destroying one by one the Jewish settlements around Medina and wresting their lands and goods and women and children as plunder. A hadîs refers to this practice of spoliation with absolute candour and incidentally brings out the theory of wholesale Islamisation of humanity. The Sahih Muslim narrates on the authority of Abu Hurairah:

We were sitting in the mosque when the Messenger of Allah came and said: Let us go to the Jews. We went out with him until we came to them. The Messenger of Allah stood up and called out to them: O ye assembly of Jews, accept Islam and you will be safe (No. 4363).

This last sentence has been called the communication of the message (of Islam) and, as has been explained previously, this is the best mode of inaugurating a jihâd, The hadîs then indicates that the Jews were not agreeable to the call. The Prophet repeated the call three times consecutively and failing a satisfactory response said:

You should know that the earth belongs to Allah and His Prophet, and I wish that I should expel you from this land (Ibid).

In other words, the whole earth is the mujâhid's field of spoliation. The Hadis has not minced matters, but divulged the supreme mission of Islam with absolute frankness.

(6) As the last item of Hadis - addition to the Koranic doctrine of ghanîmah, we may mention the treatment meted out to the female captives whom the mujâhid's right hand possesses. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they are subjected to unrestricted concubinage. The following hadîs brings this out without a vestige of vagueness or obscurity:

At the battle of Hunain, Allah's Messenger sent an army to Autas. Having overcome (the infidels) and taken them captive the Companions of Allah's Messenger seemed to refrain from having intercourse with the captive women because of their husbands being polytheists. Then Allah, Most High, sent down regarding that: Forbidden unto you are the women already married except those whom your right hand possesses (Sahih Muslim, No. 3432).¹

In fine, the infidel's wealth, women and children - all are lawful plunder for the mujâhid. (1) To enjoy such plunder is glorious, if only less glorious than propagating Islam or contemplating the pleasures of the hereafter. The Koran proclaims its lawfulness and sanctity. The Hadis extends the Koranic message. The Hadis particularly dwells on it as a sort of special dispensation denied to former prophets. (2) The spoliation of Jews is elaborated in the Hadis as an earnest of Islam's mission over the whole earth. (3) The matter of those whom one's right hand possesses is explained in the Hadis with breath-taking candour.

Footnotes:

1 Koran 4/24. The Arabic phrase for those whom your right hand possesses is ma malakat ayman u
kum .