**ALI- AHMAD BAKATHI-R TRACES AN**

**INHUMAN FACE OF TYRANNYTHROUGH HIS HISTORICAL DRAMA SIR AL-HAKIM-BI-AMAR ALLAH**

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**Abstract**

*This paper discusses tyranny, the abuse of power and religion, and loss of human values during the reign of an ancient Muslim ruler, namely, Al-Hakim bi Amr Allah (The Ruler by God’s Command), the third Fatimid Caliph of Egypt (996-1021). Ali Ahmad Bakathir’s through his work Sir Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah tries to depict the evil practices of this ruler over his subjects and the struggle of the people against him. He played various tricks of politics and religion during his reign. The paper tries to highlight the crisis of values of this ruler who seems like a wild beast killing innocent people to protect his crown. Though, this ruler belonged to the Islamic culture, which calls for justice, equality and peace; they wrecked havoc and posed to be god-like and just by establishing rules against Quran and the teachings of Islam began to punish people for their disobedience.*

**Keywords:** Inhuman faces of tyranny, Abuse of Power, Abuse of Religion, Misinterpretation, Sir al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah etc.

**Introduction**

Plato and Aristotle define a tyrant as, “one who rules without law, looks to his own advantage rather than that of his subjects, and uses extreme and cruel tactics- against his own people as well as others” (Glad, 2002). Tyranny, abuse of power and suppression during the reign of many Muslim rulers is a recurrent issue throughout history in many societies and countries. Rulers had been unjust and they had mistreated their people and practiced dirty games to control them to continue in power for the whole of their life. Some Muslim rulers have been criticized by Muslim and non-Muslim writers for their abuse of power and their tyranny. In the history of the Muslim rulers, a well-known ruler- Al-Hakim bi Amr Allah (The Ruler by God’s Command) is known as dictator and mad ruler. His abuse of power and tyranny has been manifested through the play has been analysed. The Muslim ruler, in this play, exercise his power and authority on his people and close associates and assassinate those who threaten their ‘peace of mind’ and those too who may be a danger for them in coming future.

Ali Ahmad Bakathir (1910-69), had predicted the political breakdown in the Arab world through many of his plays, considered to be a direct criticism on the Arab Muslim leaders. Bakathir’s *Sir Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah* (1947), translated as The Secret of the Ruler by God’s Command, criticises a Muslim ruler named Abu Ali Mansur, known as Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, whose tyranny and dictatorship exceed all the limits. He is known as a mad ruler for his esoteric opinions and beliefs. By interpreting the teachings of Islam he suits his desires and calls himself to be a deity.

The ruler in the play loses his balance and integrity because of his lust for power. He is mad because power had adversely affected him, which in turn, affected the stability of the individual and the nation as well. Manser’s observation is relevant in this regard: “Power has an adverse effect on the integrity of those in authority and the more power they have, the worse they become” (Manser, p. 225). The analysis of the play I have taken shows how power had negatively affected the ruler, leading to a crisis of human values, tyranny, abuse of power and religion.

**Tyranny and Abuse of Power**

Ali Ahmad Bakathir’s *Sir al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah* (1947) narrates a story of a tyrant who made himself another Pharaoh. The mad Fatimid ruler of Egypt, as described by his people, Al-Hakim bi Amr Allah proclaimed himself God with the help of his close associates. The play presents how people are forced to be silent and accept what is dictated to them through the agents of the ruler and through wicked means. The ruler attempting to control people and direct them as he likes and by spreading fear among his people uses excessive power against anyone who opposes him. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the four dimensions a ruler relies on for remaining in power for a longer time. They are the people’s need, care, power and fear. Dr. Alalam points out these four dimensions and show how the ruler and the ruled are related, which is true of Al-Hakim:

Generally, we can distinguish between four dimensions which control this kind of relationship [between the ruler and his subjects]. The first one is need, which involves dependence and the seeker’s need for what wished for, like the need of the body for the soul, the earth for the water and the patient for the doctor. The second one is care which involves leniency, beneficence and guidance, like the shepherd with his herd, the father with his son and the guardian with his orphan. The third one is power which imposes others to fear and get crushed before a person who is like the sea with much water but very deep, like the sun and fire which may give warm but they may burn, … The fourth one is fear which involves cautiousness and keeping distance. Fear does not only result out of assault and power, but results out of the difficulty to predict the Caliph’s behaviour, for he resembles a child whose actions are unpredictable.(p. 187)

Al-Hakim has established his relation with his subjects on the basis of those four dimensions. The people’s need for the Caliph, the first dimension, has made them submissive, carrying out all his orders. He controls almost the whole Kingdom and distributes it to his close associates with the intention of keeping the circle away from him. He attempts to weaken his subjects through need and poverty and creates disputes and conflict among them. For example, when a group of people comes to him for assistance, he agrees to help them on the condition that he will help them only if they first join a fighting contest and the winner will get the gold pieces. He imposes many things on his people so that they always remain in need for his assistance. Care, the second dimension, does not exist during the reign of this ruler. It increased the gap between the ruler and his subjects. If it existed, the other three dimensions of need, fear and power would have disappeared. Power, of course, is important on the part of the ruler to establish security and balance in the society, but absolute power is the one which people do not like because it corrupts absolutely. During the reign of Al-Hakim, care does not exist. If it would exist at that time, it was only for achieving a whim of a ruler and by going against the desires of the subjects.

The other two dimensions of power and fear exist strongly in the play, which make the ruler believe that his people will remain meek and under control as long as he defends the above dimensions. They are manifested through many incidents in the course of the play. During his reign, Al-Hakim doesn’t heasitate to punish wrong doers disobeying Allah’s orders. By establishing his own rules and imposing them on his people he brutally murders innocent people to satisfy his ego and by sending his secret agents to spy on them.

**Misinterpretation and Abuse of Religion**

Misinterpretation and appropriation of Islam is a crucial issue that comes under the dictatorship of Al-Hakim. Religion is used by states, rulers or religious scholars to gain certain advantages. Religion cannot be separated from politics and vice versa. In this play, religion is appropriated and used by the Caliph to crush his opponents and it is used by the opposing party to take revenge on the Caliph for the injustice, dictatorship and abuse of religion and abuse of power done by him.

Bakathir reflects on this crucial subject of religion. This outsider view about the status quo of a Muslim ruler and his subjects has a relevance to our times in which many nations have revolted against their rulers in many Arab countries. The writer must have seen or read about the dictatorship of some rulers, and therefore, has gone to the past to point out to his audience the practice of the unjust Caliph. He says that there is no difference between the present rulers of his times and those of the ancient ones. In the play, the writer reveals the conflict between politics and religion represented respectively by the Caliph and the Hamza. The dialogue between them on this issue reveals a lot about the Caliph’s politics against Islam and eminent Muslim scholars. As an attempt to soothe the Hamza, who is willing to go to speak to people to defend Islam, the Caliph admits that he is never consciously against the tenets of Islam.

Al-Hakim’s false perception of religion is manifested by his below mentioned speech :

Al-Hakim: Oh Allah! These people don’t understand the wisdom behind my rules. How can they understand the wisdom behind Your rules? Lord! They are all angry with me. If You are happy with me, I don’t care (with them).

(His eyes full with tears). My lord, I don’t see You are angry with me because I have violated some rules of Your Book, for I want to reform what I can. You have forbidden adultery and I exterminated it by compelling women to stay at home. You have forbidden wine and I eradicated it by uprooting the grape-vines. You have forbidden theft and robbing and I put an end to it by prohibiting people from going out at night.(Bakathir, p. 30)

Al-Hakim badly affects the image of Islam and destroys his society by taking up extreme steps. Firstly, he forces woman to stay at home to fight adultery. Secondly, he eradicates grapevine to stop wine production. Thirdly, he prohibits people from going out at night to stop theft. These odd steps contradict the teachings of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah. People are forced by Al-Hakim to submit and surrender to him. He feels that they know what is right for their people and they think that they can do better without the instructions of the Quran.

**Crisis of Human Values**

The miserable aspects during the journey which is imposed on the people are crisis of human values and degradation. Al-Hakim once kills an innocent child to satisfy his whim. He goes on *contemplating* on the organs of the child’s body and describes how Allah has created them. He holds the heart, the liver, the lungs … etc and asks: “where is that vibrant life? Where is that beauty? All have gone. … Here I have got rid of Mercy. I have got rid of the human weakness” (Bakathir, p. 18). This lust for blood goes on. Another crime done by him is that he cuts off the tongue of a man for speaking to his wife at bedtime about the ruler. As being reported by one of the spies that one man had been praying to Allah to save this country from this tyrant, Al-Hakim becomes furious and do this . With such kind of practice, he forces people to keep silence and dare not speak a single word against him.

Al-Hakim’s personality is well-expressed through his actions, judgments and his words. Though sometimes he praises knowledge and scholars and builds schools for them, at other times he doesn’t hesitate to destroy the schools. He wears woollen clothes and sits in darkness for many years to practice his favourite sport to get rid of the human weakness to be godlike. He abolishes Zakat, prevents Duha prayer, Taraweeh and Pilgrimage, and orders people to close shops at daytime and opens them at night. l. He orders the demolition of the Resurrection Church in Jerusalem and forces the Jews and Christians to embrace Islam or leave the country. Al-Hakim’s orders are meant to test the people’s loyalty and willingness to obey him. Just noticing their submission and obedience, he asks them to worship him. For this purpose, he establishes a centre called the *House of Wisdom* for preparing and guiding Ismailia advocates.

**Conclusion**

Al-Hakim out of pride did not realize that power alone is not an active mean to keep the kingdom or the country stable. A ruler can win the hearts of his subjects by doing justice, and by showing good manners, care and love. The moment ruler began to suspect his subjects, imbalance and violence begin to emerge. With thoughts of doubts in mind, Al-Hakim begins to crush their subjects the moment they sense danger approaching them. That Al-Hakim cuts off the tongue of one of the people who is heard at night talking ill of him testifies this. It is true that the ruler had lusted for power “to satisfie vicious and cruel appetite, without respect of God, of right or of the law”. Al-Hakim misrepresented Islam and its teachings to suit his whims. He was tyrants and unjust towards their families and their people as well. They killed innocent people, imprisoned, and exiled Hamzas. He abused religion and used it to his advantage to crush his opponents to stay in power as long as possible.

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