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## 2. Sayyid Radhi and the Nahju 'I-Balaghah

To get to know the Nahju 'I-Balaghah without being acquainted with the personality of its compiler would be an incomplete introduction to this marvellous book.

Sayyid Radhi<sup>1</sup> was a literary figure, a poet, and a man of letters; he was very much enamoured of the sayings of Imam 'Ali. Ath-Tha'alabi, a contemporary of Sayyid Radhi, speaks about him as follows: "He was the most charming men of his age and the most noble sadat of Iraq. Alongwith his noble birth and his personal merit, he is also blessed with politeness and the best virtues ... He is the greatest of all the poets of the family of Abu Talib, even though Abu Talib's family had many distinguished poets. It would not be far from the truth if I were to say that none of the poets from the whole tribe of the Quraysh can be put in the same rank as his."<sup>2</sup>

Sayyid Radhi observed the sayings of Imam 'Ali from the point of view of eloquence and clarity, this observation steamed from the attraction which he had towards literature in general and the sayings of 'Ali in particular. Even in his collection of the sayings of the Imam, Sayyid Radhi's selection was made by keeping in mind the perspective of literature, and the parts which were marked by eloquence and clarity attracted his attention most.

Because of the same reason he named the book as *Nahju 'I-Balaghah* – the Path towards Eloquence. And for the same reason he did not give importance to the providing of sources for the Imam's sayings except in a few places where, because of particular reasons, he gives the source of the relevant part.

In writing history or collecting the ahadith the most important thing is, first of all, the specification of the documents and sources, otherwise it cannot be reliable and authentic. On the other hand, the value of a literary work lies in its subtlety, beauty, melliflence and charm. At the same time it cannot be said that Sayyid Radhi was unmindful of the historical and other values of this noble work, and was only interested in its literary aspect. Fortunately, in recent times, others have attempted to collect the sources of the Nahju 'I-Balaghah.

Probably, the most comprehensive book, in this field, is *Nahju 's-Sa'adah fi Mustadrak Nahji 'I-*

*Balaghah*, which is being prepared by Muhammad Baqir Mahmudi, a Shi'ah scholar of Iraq. In this general collection of the sayings of Imam 'Ali, his sermons, commandments, letters, advices, prayers and aphorisms have been collected.

This book contains, together with the Nahju 'l-Balaghah, other sayings of the Imam which were not incorporated by Sayyid Radhi or were not at his disposal. Apparently the sources of all the contents of the Nahju 'l-Balaghah, with the exception of some of the aphorisms, have been quoted therein. Until now only four volumes of this book have been printed.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the work of collecting the sayings of Imam 'Ali was not only done by Sayyid Radhi, others have also worked along the same lines. The most famous of these other collections is *al-Ghurar wa 'd-Durar* of Amudi which was condensed into Persian by Jalalu 'd-Din Khunsari and was recently published by the University of Tehran through the efforts of Mir Jalalu 'd-Din Muhaddith Arami. 'Ali al-Jundi, dean of the Science faculty of al-Azhar University, in the preface of *'Ali bin Abi Talib – shi'ruhu wa hikamuhu* mentioned some of the books and manuscripts containing the sayings of Imam 'Ali; some of these are still available in manuscript only:

1. *Dastur Ma'alimi 'l-Hikam* by al-Qudha'i, the writer of al-Khutat.
2. *Nathru al-Li'ali*; this book has been translated and printed by a Russian orientalist in one bulky volume.
3. *Hikam Sayyidina 'Ali*; a manuscript copy of this book exists in Daru 'l-Kutub al-Misriyyah.

<sup>1</sup>. (translator's note) Abu 'l-Hasan Muhammad known as ash-Sharif ar-Radhi (359/969–406/1015), his genealogy stretches back, after seven generations, to Imam Musa al-Kazim the seventh Shi'ite Imam. He is from a well-known family which was respected by the 'Abbassides and the Buyaids rulers; his father was the naqib (head of the descendents of the Prophet) of his time. His famous works, besides the compilation of the Nahju 'l-Balaghah, are al-Majazatu 'n-Nabawiyah, Haqi'iqu 't-Ta'wil, and Talkhi'u al-Bayan fi Majazi al-Qur'an. There exist also a collection of his poems known as Diwan Sharif ar-Radhi in two volumes. For his biography see A'yanu 'sh-Shi'ah of al-'Amili, ash-Sharif ar-Radhi of M. R. Kashifu al-Ghita.

<sup>2</sup>. Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, Nahju 'l-Balaghah (with commentary in foot-notes), Beirut 1973, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>. (translator's note) At the time of translating this book, eight volumes of the Nahju 's-Sa'adah fi Mustadrak Nahji al-Balaghah have been published in Beirut. In volume I to III, the compiler has recorded 509 sermons and lectures, of which the time of 388 lectures has also been specified; in volume IV and V, 186 letters of the Imam have been collected; in volume VI and VII, 65 advices and in the last volume 105 invocations have been gathered. Besides this work, there is a book known as Masadir Nahji al-Balaghah wa Asaniduhu, in four volumes, by Sayyid 'Abdu 'z-Zahra'. After a lengthy introduction on the authenticity of the Nahju 'l-Balaghah and on its commentaries, the writer, in the first three volumes has recorded the sources of 239 sermons and lectures of the Nahju 'l-Balaghah; and in the last volume the sources of 480 short sayings have been mentioned.

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