

Accountability

As we have already said, freedom in its wide sense was the real basis of the government of Ali. In his eyes this freedom was as much related with the mutual relations of the people as with intellect and conscience. Man who wishes to cover different stages of advancement by means of mutual co-operation and brotherly relations cannot achieve success in this behalf unless he is free in his individual and collective capacities. And it is not possible for him to be free unless his conscience is free from those defects which destroy the value of man. Similarly that person cannot also be free whose rights for freedom are admitted by the society but ignored in practice.

In this matter Ali meted out equal treatment to the individuals and the society as well as to friends and the foes. He followed this line of action very firmly. He could not be made to deviate from his object by any allurements or threats. He knew very well that truth is unpalatable to many persons. It is for this reason that he says: "Our matter is very difficult".

He was also aware that truth is especially hard for the rulers. He therefore, says: "Truth weighs heavily upon the rulers and every truth is heavy".

However, whether truth is heavy on the rulers and the dignitaries or light, it was immaterial for Ali, because his intellect as well as conscience obliged him not to deviate from truth in the least, and he did not attach any importance to things other than intellect and conscience. Intellect and conscience compelled Ali not to turn away his face from the people who sought justice and not to leave the ruled at the mercy of the rulers so that they (the people) might bear the hardships of need and suffer from hunger which might dry up their palates and kindle a fire in their bellies. This intellect and conscience directed Ali not to leave the bounties and blessings at the disposal of those whose bellies were full, and who ate without hunger and drank without thirst, and led luxurious lives at the expense of the common people.

All's fear that the influential persons and the dignitaries would not tolerate his just ways and methods of government, as expressed by him before the oath of allegiance was taken to him proved to be true. Hence, after taking the oath of allegiance, those nobles and dignitaries demanded from him that they might be given larger shares from the public treasury as compared with others, but Ali replied: "I am not

going to give anyone anything to which he is not entitled”.

Talha and Zubayr came to him to make a deal and said: “We are prepared to take the oath of allegiance to you on the condition that we shall be your partners in running the government”. However, Ali replied to them in the negative without any hesitation.

On hearing this reply they left him and began mobilizing an army to fight against him, as will be mentioned in detail later.

Ali knew very well that Talha and Zubayr were very influential and they had a large number of supporters in Kufa and Basra. However, it was justice which Ali loved most. He said: “Do you want me to achieve success by means of oppression? By Allah this will never be. Unjustified award is extravagance”.

Food is not brought before a person who is satiated. Wealth, small or large, was not lawful in the eyes of Ali until it was acquired by lawful, means. It should not have been acquired by hoarding, or by exploiting the people or by taking undue advantage of one's position as a ruler.

Ali forgave many crimes of the criminals and overlooked many evil deeds of the oppressors, but he did not tolerate that the hoarders, should exploit and oppress the people. According to him oppression was a curse in whatever shape it might be, but the worst oppression was that exercised by the powerful on the weak, by the hoarder on the public, and by the ruler on the ruled. He could not ignore an oppression, which might give birth to wickedness and crime in the society.

Study 'Nahj al-Balaghah' and you will see how fiery his words are when he speaks about the exploitation of the people. He mentioned this topic in every speech of his. His remarks show that he was fully convinced that exploitation of the wealth of others is a social crime. Whoever acquires wealth by unlawful means is an oppressor and must be punished for his offence. In one of his sermons Ali says about the hoarders: “And he should remember the wealth which he accumulated and did not care as to where he acquired it from (i.e. did not make any difference between lawful and unlawful sources) and collected wealth by lawful and unlawful means. He should rest assured that he will be punished for accumulating the wealth by illegal means”.

However, as regards accumulation of wealth which is untainted by usurpation, oppression and hoarding he says: “Whoever dies while earning by lawful means will die in such a condition that God will be pleased with him”.

It was for this reason that Ali had decided that he would demolish the structures which had been erected on the foundation of usurpation and oppression, abolish the custom of spending the wealth of the public treasury on one's relatives, and would not permit the influential class to exploit the common man.

In one of his speeches he declared thus in clear words: “Look here! Whoever was assigned land by Uthman out of Allah's property should return it to the public treasury because nothing can annul an old

right. If I come to know that women have been married by spending the money of the public treasury or that money has been distributed in different cities, my utmost effort will be to restore that money to its original position. Justice covers a wide range, and if justice is hard upon a person injustice will be harder upon him”.

It is possible that there may have been some kings and rulers who may not have given anything to an undeserving person from the public treasury and may not have spent public money lavishly on their friends and relatives. However, we do not come across anyone like Ali, who compelled those who had become rich by unlawful means during the period of the former governments to render account of their earning and to return to the public treasury the wealth which they had earned unlawfully. This brave action of Ali proves that he had immense knowledge of the state of affairs and had such a perfect faith in social justice as was not possessed by anyone else.

If the rule that only that person who works hard and renders service to the society should be rewarded, is correct, then the question arises as to what public service Harith son of Hakam had rendered that he should have been given three hundred thousand dirhams by Uthman from the public treasury on the day his (Harith's) marriage took place? Was marrying Uthman's daughter a public service? [1](#)

What service had Talha and Zubayr rendered to the Muslims as a recompense whereof they got such large amounts of dirhams and dinars and big land grants from Uthman that if they had been distributed among the hundreds of thousands of the Muslims all of them would have become rich and would have got more than they might have hoped and desired? [2](#)

What preferential rights did Talha and Zubayr possess that they should have had thousands of slaves and slave-girls? Even if it is admitted that they embraced Islam at its earliest stage and were the distinguished companions of the Prophet and had rendered great services to Islam they had done all this for the sake of God and should have expected its reward from God in the Hereafter. God never allows the efforts of the righteous to go in vain. Whatever services they rendered to Islam were rendered by them to seek the pleasure of God and it is He who gives the best reward. But what special right had they on the public treasury on which all the Muslims enjoyed equal rights? What deeds of public welfare were performed by the relatives of Uthman as a reward for which he opened the doors of the public treasury for them, entrusted the administration of the state to them, made them the masters of the lives, property and honour of the Muslims and allowed them to utilize everything in whatever manner they liked?

One of these relatives of his was Mu`awiya, who was notorious for taking bribes. And there were many other relatives and friends of his including Hakam son of `Aas and Abdullah son of Sa'd.

What services had Mu`awiya rendered to Islam as a reward for which he was made the governor of Palestine and Hamas, besides Syria, and was also entrusted the command of four armies? From where did the relatives of Uthman acquire such immense wealth and how did they erect lofty palaces in all cities and villages? When these persons did not render any public service from where did they get

capital to finance these projects? If a person possesses usurped wealth for a long time he does not become its owner nor does that wealth become his personal property. Falsehood does not become truth if it persists for a long time.

It was for this reason that Ali had decided to get restored to the public treasury all those lands and wealth which had been given by Uthman to undeserving persons by depriving those who deserved them even though that wealth might have been scattered in different cities or given to women as their dowry. Justice is a means of prosperity and comfort for the people and it cannot be limited or confined.

Another point which deserves attention is this that Ali considered the lands, which had been made personal property by the people on account of their being Uthman's relatives or favourites, as well as the benefits drawn from them, to be usurped property. Ali knew very well what sort of people Uthman's kinsmen were. He was aware that after usurping the lands they would take forced labour from the common people and accumulate the produce and would acquire more property with this income. Thus their capital would increase day after day and whereas others would continue to become poorer they themselves would grow richer and richer.

Then these big landowners would purchase the holdings of small owners and consequently only two classes would be left. viz. the capitalists and the indigent who would have to depend on the former and serve them. In his testament for Malik Ashtar Ali says: "Beware! Do not give a land to any of your associates and relatives. He should not expect from you that you will allow him to occupy a land which is harmful for the neighbouring people in the matter of irrigation or any other common matter, so that he may throw the burden thereof on others".

The fears of the Commander of the Faithful about the land grants proved to be too true. Those persons took abundant forced labour from the common people and subjected them to every kind of injustice and oppression.

Dr. Taha Husayn writes in the first volume of his book entitled 'Al-fitnatu'l Kubra': "On the one side there were big landowners and nobles and on the other side there were indigent persons who were the slaves of these land-owners and nobles. Out of them there emerged a new class in Islam i.e. those who were the chiefs of the nation according to the tribal custom prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula and had now become more distinguished and dignified on account of abundant wealth and a large number of associates".

According to Ali all are entitled to share the profit which accrues from gold and land and only that person, who works harder and is also more needy, is entitled to a larger share. Whoever denies this reality commits treachery with his people. In the eyes of Ali the greatest treachery is the treachery committed with the public. Ali considers that man who commits treachery with the public to be mean and despicable. He never relied upon such persons and never associated with them.

Ali endeavoured to safeguard the rights of the people to the utmost extent. Whenever he took a decision

none could make him deviate from it. He did not care if the people deserted him and joined the enemy. He was the embodiment of truth and whatever he said was absolute justice.

Ali did not show preferential treatment even to the devoted companions of the Prophet, who had participated in the battles along with him. He says: “Beware! There are some persons among you whom the world has made prosperous. They have acquired lands and dug canals. They ride on strong horses and possess larger number of slaves and slave-girls. If I prohibit them tomorrow from doing things in which they are immersed and restrict them to the rights of which they are well aware they should not complain that Ali has deprived them of their rights. Remember! Whether they be the Muhajirs or the Ansar, whoever from amongst them thinks that he is superior to others is mistaken.

Superiority will be decided upon before God on the Day of Judgment. It is only God who can reward the people. Remember! Whoever has acknowledged God and His Prophet, certified our community, joined our religion and turned to our qiblah is entitled to the rights and responsibilities of Islam. All of you are the slaves of God and the wealth, which belongs to God will be divided amongst you equally. None enjoys preference over another. The righteous and the pious will get better reward from God”.

This very equal treatment meted out by Ali to common people made the nobles and distinguished persons among Quraysh leave Ali and join Mu`awiya as will be mentioned in detail later.

It was impossible for Ali to prefer those who enjoyed a higher position to those who were at a comparatively lower level, because according to him the criterion of virtue and excellence was not that which was prevalent in his days. He did not prefer a Qurayshite to a non-Qurayshite or an Arab to a non-Arab, because he considered all men to be brothers of one another. He could not flatter those chiefs and nobles as Mu`awiya did, nor could he attract people towards himself by means of the wealth of the Muslims.

Malik Ashtar said to the Commander of the Faithful: “O Commander of the Faithful! We joined the people of Basra and Kufa and performed jihad against the people of Basra. At that time all were of one view. Thereafter differences arose. Their intentions became weak and their number decreased. You are just to all and act according to what is right. Consequently they got scared on account of your justice. On the other hand they saw the policies and methods which Mu`awiya adopts with regard to the rich and the noble, because there are very few people in the world who do not aspire for worldly gains. There are many who buy falsehood at the price of truth and adopt the world. In case, therefore, you distribute wealth lavishly among the people and give more to the influential persons you will see how their necks become inclined towards you and how they sing songs in your praise and become your well-wishers. May God settle your affairs and disperse and weaken the association and the deceit of your enemies. God is certainly aware of their deeds”.

Ali said in reply: “You have said that I act according to justice. The reason for this is that God says: ***“Whoever does good deeds does them for his own benefit and whoever does bad deeds suffers***

on their account. Your Lord does not do injustice to His slaves". (41:46)

If I violate this rule I am afraid that I will have to suffer on this account.

As regards your saying that some persons have deserted us because truth is intolerable for them, God knows better that they have not left us because we have been unjust to them. And it is also not so that after leaving us they have sought refuge with a just person. There is no reason for their deserting us except that they have sought the material world and this world is not lasting. On the Day of Judgment they will be questioned as to whether they sought the world or acted for the sake of God.

Now as regards our spending money to attract the people, it is not lawful for us to give anyone from the public property more than what he is entitled to. (And I do not bother if the number of my adherents decreases owing to my being just) God says thus and what He says is correct:

"How many a smaller party has overpowered those who are stronger numerically, with the will of God. And God is with those who are patient". (2:249)

God appointed the Prophet to the prophetic mission when he was all alone. He had few supporters and then their number increased. He bestowed honour on his group after they had been humiliated. If God wishes to give a better turn to our affairs He will solve these difficulties and make the matters easy for us".

The gist of his policies and the method of his government is embodied in the testament which he wrote and gave to Malik Ashtar while appointing him the governor of Egypt. He said therein: "Beware! Do not appropriate to yourself the things in which all the people have equal share".

The public rights are those which vest in all the citizens equally and those are the rights to which Ali has alluded in his above remarks.

1. Uthman gave three hundred thousand dirhams to Harith son of Hakam (brother of Marwan) who was his second son-in-law and husband of his daughter Ayesha (Kitab al-Ansab, Balazari, Vol.5, p.58).

Balazari says at another place: Camels received as zakat were brought before Uthman and he gave all of them to Harith son of Hakam (Kitab al-Ansab, Vol.5, p.28).

Allama Ibn Qutaiba, Ibn Abd Rabih and Ibn Abi al-Hadid have narrated that the Prophet had endowed 'Mehzool', a bazaar of Madina, upon the Muslims but Uthman gave it away to Harith as a land grant (Ma'arif, p.84, Aqd al-Farid, p.261, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 1,p.27).

Uthman did favour to Harith in three ways:

(1) He gave three hundred thousand dirhams to Harith although this amount was not Uthman's personal property but belonged to the public treasury of the Muslims.

(2) He gave Harith all the camels which had been received by way of zakat.

(3) He gave to Harith by way of Jagir all the property which had been endowed by the Prophet upon the Muslims.

2. On account of the favours done by Uthman to his relatives, friends and associates they became very rich. As a consequence of the method adopted by him in the matter of division of wealth, which was opposed to the Book and the Sunnah as well as to that adopted by his predecessor, these people acquired big estates, constructed magnificent palaces and accumulated large amounts of wealth.

Zubayr son of Awam left behind eleven houses in Madina, two in Basra, one in Kufa and one in Egypt. He had four wives. They inherited one-eighth of his property and every one of them got one million and two hundred thousands. Thus the entire property left by him amounted to 59 millions and 800 thousands. (Sahih Bokhari, vol.5 p.21). In Sahih Bokhari only the number has been stated; it has not been specified whether they were dirhams or dinars, but it has been stated in Tarikh Ibn Kaseer that they were dirhams.

Allama Ibn Sa'd writes that Zubayr had estates in Egypt and houses in Alexandria, Kufa and Madina. He also received income from the suburbs of Madina. (Tabaqaat Ibn Sa'd, vol.2 p.77, Printed at Leiden)

Mas'udi says: "Zubayr left behind, on his death, one thousand horses, one thousand slaves and slave-girls and many palaces and lands. (Murooj al-Zahab, vol. 1, p. 34).

Talha son of Obaidullah left behind himself one hundred 'buhars' (ox-skins) full of gold. Allama Ibn Abd Rabih has quoted Khashni as having said that Talha left three hundred 'buhars' of gold and silver. Sibt Ibn Jauzi says that he left behind himself gold which could be loaded on three hundred camels. (Tabaqat Ibn Sa'd vol.3. p. 158. Murooj al-Zahab, v. 1. p.444. Aqd al-Farid, v.2. p.275 etc).

Allama Balazari has narrated that during the age of ignorance Hakam son of Aas was a neighbour of the Prophet and after the advent of Islam he was one of the deadly enemies and persecutors of the Prophet. When Mecca was conquered in the eighth year of Migration he came over to Madina. It is doubtful whether he embraced Islam. He used to follow the Prophet and made ridiculous signs towards him, mimicked him and made a wry face, and when the Prophet offered prayers he also stood behind him and made signs with his fingers. The result was that the shape which he gave to his face while mimicking the Prophet became permanent and did not change till he died. He also became insane.

One day while the Prophet was staying in the house of one of his wives, Hakam began peeping. The Prophet recognized him. He came out of the house and said: "Who will save me from this accursed trembling person?" Then he added: "This Hakam and his descendants cannot live where I live." He, therefore, exiled Hakam and his family to the side of Taif. When the Prophet breathed his last Uthman approached Abu Bakr with the request that Hakam might be permitted to return to Madina. Abu Bakr however, declined to accede to his request saying that he could not grant asylum to a man who had been exiled by the Prophet. When Umar became the caliph after Abu Bakr, Uthman approached him with the same request, but he also gave him the same reply which had been given by Abu Bakr.

However, when Uthman himself became the Caliph he called back Hakam and the members of his family to Madina. He told the Muslims that he had recommended to the Prophet to permit Hakam and the members of his family to return to Madina and the Prophet had promised that he would grant such a permission but he breathed his last before this could be done. The Muslims did not believe what Uthman said and disliked very much his having allowed Hakam and his descendants to return to Madina. (Kitab al-Ansab vol.5, p.27)

Uthman not only called back Hakam to Madina and made him his chief adviser, but he also gave away to him the entire property which had been collected as zakat and alms from the tribe of Bani Qaza`a.

When Hakam entered Madina he was clad in rags and the people could see in what miserable condition he was. He had with him a goat which he was driving. He entered Uthman's court in this condition. However, when he left that place he was wearing a very valuable fur cloak and had covered himself with a costly silken sheet. (Tarikh Yaqoobi, Vol.2, p.41)

Allama Balazari says: "Amongst the many acts of Uthman which annoyed the people one was this that he deputed Hakam son of Aas to collect zakat from Bani Qaza`a, which amounted to three hundred thousand dirhams and when Hakam collected this money and brought it to Uthman the latter gave away the entire amount to him". (Tarikh al-Ansab, Balazari Vol.5, p.28).

Allama Yaqoobi says that Uthman married his daughter to Abdullah son of Khalid son of Aseed and ordered that six hundred thousand dirhams might be given to him. He wrote to Abdullah son of `Aamir that this amount might be paid out of the public treasury of Basra. (Tarikh Yaqoobi, Vol.2, p.145).

Allama Ibn Abd Rabih Qartabi, Allama Ibn Qutaiba and Allama Ibn Abi al-Hadid have written that Uthman gave four hundred thousand dirhams to Abdullah (Aqd al-Farid Vol.2, p. 261.

Ma`araf, p.84 and Sharh Ibn Abi al-Hadid Vol.1, p.66).

One fifth (khums) of the war booty which was received as a result of the African war amounted to five hundred gold coins. Uthman gave this amount to Marwan son of Hakam, who was his cousin and son-in-law, being the husband of his

daughter Umm Ayan.

Allama Ibn Athir writes: Khums (one-fifth) was brought from Africa to Madina and Marwan purchased it for five hundred thousand dinars. Uthman excused him from making payment of this amount. This was one of those acts of Uthman which were criticized by the people later. (Tarikh Yaqoobi, Vol.3, p.38).

Allama Balazari and Ibn Sa'd have narrated that Uthman endowed upon Marwan the "Khums" which was received from the war in Egypt, and also bestowed large sums of money upon his relatives. He explained away these acts by saying that he had shown kindness to his kinsmen. The people disliked these actions of Uthman very much and criticized him. (Tabqat Ibn Sa'd, V.3, p.24. (Printed at Leiden) and Kitab al-Ansab Balazari, Vol.5, p.25).

Uthman gave one hundred thousand dirhams to Sa'id son of `Aas. Ali, Talha, Zubayr, Sa'd son of Abi Waqas and Abdur Rahman son of Auf had a talk with him in this regard. He, however, told them that Sa'id was a relative and a kinsman of his and by giving the said amount to him he had shown kindness to a kinsman. (Kitab al-Ansab, Vol.5, p. 28).

He gave large sum of money out of the public treasury to Walid son of Aqba son of Abi Mu`et who was his brother from his mother's side.

Allama Balazari says: "When Walid was appointed as governor of Kufa Abdullah son of Mas`ud was in charge of the public treasury. Walid borrowed a large sum of money from the treasury.

The rulers used to borrow in this manner and returned it when they received their salaries. After a few days Ibn Mas`ud demanded the money back. Walid complained to Uthman against this demand by Ibn Mas`ud. Thereupon Uthman wrote to Ibn Mas`ud: "You are only a treasurer. Do not press Walid to return the money borrowed by him. It is not proper to expostulate with him". (Kitab al-Ansab, Vol. 5,p. 1)

The day on which Uthman got one hundred thousand dirhams paid to Marwan from the public treasury he also got two hundred thousand dirhams paid to Abu Sufyan. (Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Allama Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Vol.8, p.27).

Allama Ibn Abi al-Hadid says that Uthman gave the entire war booty received from different places in Africa, where battles were fought, to his foster-brother Abdullah bin Abi Sarha to the exclusion of all other Muslims (Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, V. 1, p.27).

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