

## Combat oppression

In all general matters Ali led a very consistent and harmonious life. His high morals, unusual sagacity, his actions relating to the administration of the state, command of the army and other personal characteristics and qualities were all similar and inter-connected. He hated usury, hoarding and oppression very much. He was a fell enemy of the wealthy and powerful persons who oppressed others, the ignorant considered themselves to be superior to others, and persisted in their stubborn views founded on ignorance.

He was extremely keen to help the weak and the indigent, because they too were human beings and it is highly unjustifiable to treat them to be mean and humble. He desired the freedom of the creatures of God from the core of his heart, because God has created them free and it is not at all proper that they should be subjected to humiliation and abjectness. Their humiliation and abjectness is the humiliation and abjectness of humanity, and whoever humiliates humanity deserves to be treated an enemy.

It can be realized by everyone from what has been stated above how great a supporter and sympathizer of the helpless and oppressed persons Ali was, how he fought against the enemies of virtue and goodness, and how much annoyance he expressed against those who acted against the dictates of reason and conscience.

However, what has been written by us on the subject does not appear to be sufficient. It appears necessary to allocate a separate and detailed chapter to the subject showing how Ali behaved with the tyrants, and what his views were about injustice and oppression.

There are many kinds of injustice. For example to usurp the property of a person is injustice of one kind and to hurt his honour and reputation is injustice of another kind. Sometimes injustice is patent whereas at other times it is latent. We shall discuss all these kinds of injustice one by one.

It is not possible to find any sermon or testament of the Commander of the Faithful, in which he may not have mentioned and condemned injustice severely. His entire life was spent in waging war against injustice and oppression and against the oppressors and tyrants. He fought this war with his hands, tongue and orders and commands as well as with his sword.

War against injustice and oppression is being fought ever since man arrived on earth. However, this war has been fought in different ways and in different conditions. Those who undertook to campaign against the tyrants and oppressors of their time were hundreds of thousands in number. These great heroes were a source of pride for humanity whereas the tyrants stained the pages of history with their misdeeds. Those heroes came in succession and every one of them inherited this holy war from another.

They have also been some great souls amongst the human beings whose entire lives were spent in waging war against injustice and oppression. The biographies of Abraham, Moses and Jesus consist of war against oppression, usury and injustice. Muhammad's campaign against the polytheists was also in continuation of and complementary to the war waged by Jesus. He started a great revolutionary movement to uproot injustice and oppression and did not rest till the oppressed were emancipated and their lives took a turn for the better.

Cruelty becomes the second nature of some persons. They commit atrocities with perfect ease in the same way in which they perform other natural acts like eating, drinking, walking and breathing. To this category belong persons like Nero, Changez Khan, European officers of the 'Inquisition' during the Middle Ages, and many other kinds and rulers like Hajjaj bin Yusuf, Ziad bin Abih, Obaidullah bin Ziad, Muslim bin Aqba etc. And similarly history tells us about innumerable other persons in whom opposition to injustice was inherent and had become their second nature.

The reason for the tyrants of the past not being ashamed of the atrocities committed by them was that they were not pained by their cruel acts. They did not tyrannize or oppress others with any aim or object. They did so because it had become their habit.

Once Hajjaj bin Yusuf was having his meals along with some friends of his. Before him was standing an innocent old man who was trembling with fear. Hajjaj raised his head and looked at the old man. Then he ordered one of his servants to behead him. The order was complied with immediately and the old man was beheaded. Hajjaj continued to eat as if nothing had happened. He said to his slave loudly: "Bring cold water".

Nero set the city of Rome on fire. While Rome was burning Nero was busy in his merry-makings.

The firmness and steadfastness of those who consistently campaigned against injustice and oppression can also be explained in the same way. Just as the persons mentioned above committed injustice because it was inherent in their nature, in the same way these benefactors of humanity fought against injustice and supported the oppressed, because they were compelled by their nature to do so.

Socrates drank the cup of poison as if it was a medicine because his drinking it was a display of firmness and steadfastness against falsehood. Voltaire <sup>1</sup> waged war against the aristocrats and nobles of Europe. He was compelled to wage this war by his nature just as a hungry person is obliged to eat food or a thirsty person is compelled by his inner urge to get hold of water to quench his thirst. The companions of Imam Husayn also sacrificed their lives in support of his mission, although they could see

a huge army of Bani Umayyah arrayed against them.

These people were the benefactors of mankind and the great and magnanimous souls among human beings, whose head and leader was Ali ibn Abi Talib. He had come into the world to establish truth and to destroy falsehood. He rose with this purpose and also accepted the caliphate with this very object in view. However, the world, with all its expanse could hardly accept the laws and principles of Ali. The unjust and cruel persons were large in numbers and possessed much strength. The task which Ali wished to accomplish was difficult as well as dangerous.

Ali told the people that they should neither be the oppressors nor the oppressed ones. He wished that none should oppress others and none should tolerate oppression. However, the people of the time were not prepared to accept Ali's view and could not lend support to his intentions. So much so that even the oppressed persons did not side with him, because they were over awed by the oppressors and were afraid of their enmity and grudge.

They were so foolish that they took bribes from Ali's enemies and withdrew their support from him. Eventually only a few God-fearing and brave persons were left with him, and they did not desert him at any cost.

However, was it proper that Ali should have shown frailty and weakness at this juncture when the forces of evil had formed a front against him? Is it possible for a brave man to lose heart and give up effort because he is faced with calamities and hardships with men like carnivores around him, particularly when everybody is afraid of death also?

Should Ali have been disheartened and become sluggish when the enemies were becoming more and more rebellious, when the men in authority had lost all sense of wisdom, were selling religion for the sake of the world, were stupidly running after wealth and rank, had created chaos in the cities, were persisting in oppression, were full of pride and conceit, creating innovations and void things before the right things, praising the wrong and evil doing, and still hoping for a good reward, had annihilated justice and fair play, and had created rebellion, and chaos, and their tyranny and violence had no bounds.

Could he become weak and languid when the condition of his companions was this: "Whoever called them for help never succeeded. Whoever met them did not acquire peace of mind. Whoever came in the battlefield accompanied by them sustained loss. They were deaf inspite of having ears and were dumb although they possessed power of speech. They neither showed steadfastness in the battlefield like noble and zealous men nor could one depend upon their sympathy and support at the time of adversity".

Of course in such conditions and circumstances one should become weak and feeble and must sit down languidly – but it is subject to the condition that he should not be Ali ibn Abi Talib.

The deep love which Ali had in his heart for every human being obliged him not to show the least leniency to one who did harm to the people even though he (i.e. Ali) had to lay down his life in the

campaign.

One who considers it love and kindness and a sign of gentleness to remain silent in the face of the oppressors is either a liar or is not acquainted with human nature, because the position is otherwise. True love and kindness for mankind means that the oppressors should be dealt with severely so that they may free the people from bondage. In certain circumstances kindness and gentleness compel man to resort to extreme severity.

Man likes beauty as much as he detests ugliness. He hates injustice and oppression as much as he desires justice. He is as much afraid of the coldness of non-existence as he is fond of the warmth of existence. A person cannot strike a sword on the necks of the rebels and the oppressors unless he considers life to be a blessing. In short one who does not hate cannot also love.

The best proof of the fact that Ali was as much as harsh upon the oppressors as he was kind towards others and was prepared to be extremely severe to eliminate injustice is provided by the event of Saudah daughter of Ammarah Hamdaniyah.

Saudah says: "I saw the Commander of the Faithful to complain against an agent who had been appointed by him to collect zakat. When I stood before him he said with much kindness: "Do you want anything to be done?" I complained to him against the agent. On hearing what I narrated he began to weep and said praying to God: "O Lord! I have neither ordered these agents to oppress the people nor asked them to abandon your right". Then he took out a piece of paper from his pocket and wrote on it as follows: –

"Weigh and measure properly and do not give lesser to the people nor spread mischief on the earth. When you receive this letter keep the things in your charge in reserve so that another person may come and take over the same from you".

It can well be observed from this incident how kind Ali was to the oppressed woman, because he began to weep on hearing her tale. And it is also evident how this kindness was converted into harshness for the agents. This accords with the principles of extreme kindness for the oppressed and extreme wrath towards the oppressor.

Ali never refrained from campaigning against refractoriness and injustice. Whenever he saw a person being oppressed by another he showed no weakness in relieving him of the oppression. And how could he show any weakness or hesitation when gentleness and kindness had equipped him with unusual manliness and steadfastness and had made him very fond of fighting against falsehood and establishing truth. It was his firm belief that: "The presence of an Imam through whom the right of a weak person may be realized from a strong person and that of an oppressed person from an oppressor is necessary so that the righteous may live in comfort and feel secure from the mischief of the evil-doers".

"God has provided protection to the people from being oppressed". And when God has provided

protection there should be no occasion for oppression but “God tests the rulers by means of oppression”. Hence if the rulers are oppressive their rule will come to an end because: “Even if the oppressor gets respite he cannot escape being captured by God. God Himself lies in ambush for him and his ambushing will be very severe. The Day of Judgment will be much severer for the oppressor than that on which he oppressed another. The oppressed person must not have suffered so much as the oppressor will suffer on the Day of Judgment”.

The following form part of those orders of Ali which must always be complied with: “I order you to behave harshly with the oppressor. Hold the foolish oppressor by the hand, and stop him from committing injustice”.

No doubt the kindness and affection which Ali had in his mind guaranteed his steadfastness in the battle between truth and falsehood. Whenever he reflected about truth and falsehood he said: “O Lord! Our sole endeavour is that peace and tranquility may prevail in Your cities so that Your slaves may remain safe”. And when he initiated the campaign he used to say: “I swear by God that I shall realize the right of the oppressed person from the oppressor. I shall put a cavessor in the nose of the oppressor and pull him to the spring of the truth however much he may dislike it”. Or said: “It is necessary that the oppressor refrains from committing injustice, behaves with the people equitably and does not spread mischief on the earth”.

If the fighting became furious and Ali noticed the disparity between the numbers of his supporters and the enemy and compared his own condition with that of his opponents he said: “I have not shown weakness or sluggishness. I shall continue to fight against falsehood until I extract truth from its side”.

Ali saw death staring in his eyes but neither his hands were tired of fighting nor did he entertain the least fear in his heart. He would not have felt afraid even if the entire population of Arabia had joined hands and encircled him.

He relied fully on his own justice and equity and firmly believed that whatever he was doing was in accordance with the canons of equity and justice. He used to say: “A weak person is strong in my eyes until I get his right paid to him, and a strong person is weak in my eyes until I receive the right from him”. He also said: “I swear by God that I am not worried whether death falls upon me or I fall upon death”.

When he fought against a group of unjust persons and defeated them but they still offered some resistance he said: “some life is still left in the oppressors. If God wills we shall uproot them. In case, however, some of them run away to various cities the matter would be different”.

According to Ali the learned persons are the leaders of the nation and for this very reason a number of responsibilities devolve upon them. Their greatest responsibility is that they should oppose the oppressor and assist the oppressed person. He says: “God has made it mandatory for the ulema that they should not remain silent spectators of injustice of the oppressor and the grief and helplessness of the oppressed person.

In order that the oppressors should be eliminated from the society, and that there should also be none who may assist in the perpetration of oppression or may tolerate it willingly, Ali has divided the sins of the people into different categories. There are certain sins which may be forgiven but injustice and oppression cannot be forgiven in any circumstances. He says: ``And the sin which will not be forgiven is that one person may oppress another". He held the view that: "Oppressing a weak person is the worst type of oppression".

Thus he endeavoured by all means to eliminate injustice and this remained his basic policy in the matter of treatment with the people. He fought against the oppressors with his tongue as well as with his sword and remained steadfast in his struggle. He continued to fight against injustice and the unjust till he met martyrdom. If the vicissitudes of time had not hampered his program and the conditions had not been unfavourable, he would have brought about a change in a number of things.

1. Voltaire, a famous French writer and a renowned figure of his time was born in Paris in 1694 A.D. and died in 1778 A.D. He spent a large part of life in England, Russia and Switzerland. He severely, criticized the rulers and religious leaders of his time. It was he who paved the path for the great French Revolution of 1789 A.D. He is the author of many valuable books

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