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Conditions prior to Ali

Before we explain what ideas and beliefs Ali held about human brotherhood and how he respected human rights it appears necessary to mention what the Prophet did for the welfare of humanity, what rules and regulations he enacted, and how far he respected human rights. It is necessary to do so, because Ali's only responsibility was to enforce the rules promulgated by the Prophet and to accomplish what he had wished. What Ali did was a complement of the acts of the Prophet and every step taken by him was linked with the steps taken by the Prophet.

The Prophet of Islam paid full attention to the material and social conditions of the society. Islam enacted rules and regulations for the human society in the same manner in which it enacted them for the individuals.

Islam attaches so much importance to the human brotherhood and society that it treats every national service to be an act of worship – rather, national service enjoys precedence over the performance of religious rites. The Prophet of Islam has said: "Resolving differences and disputes is better than recommended prayers and fasting".

The following incident shows clearly how much the Prophet was concerned about the welfare of the nation and the society:

Ibn Abdullah says: We (i.e. the companions) were accompanying the Prophet in a journey. Some of us were fasting whereas others were not. It was summer season. We halted at a place. No shade was available to us except the sheets of cloth which we were carrying. There were many amongst us who were protecting their faces from sunshine with their hands. Those of us who were not fasting stood up and pitched the tents and provided water to the animals. Thereupon the Prophet of Islam said: "Today those persons who are not fasting have appropriated the entire spiritual reward to themselves".

This incident shows that fasting which is an important mandatory article of worship ceases to be valid during journey so that one may not show laxity in economic matters for that reason and may not become incapable of serving the creatures of God.

The Prophet has also said: "When anyone of you sees an indecent thing being done he should stop it

with his hands and if he cannot do so he should stop it with his tongue. And if he cannot stop it with his tongue he should condemn it in his heart. And this (i.e. the third alternative) is the weakest stage of faith".

'Ordering to do good and restraining from evil' is such an explicit order in Islam that by its means every sort of good can be done to others, and all types of evil can be eliminated. There are many traditions quoted from the Prophet which go to show that whoever renders any service to the nation is superior to a devout person. This is about common persons who render service to the nation. In case, however, one, who renders such service, is also a scholar, he will no doubt be superior to millions of devout persons in the eyes of the Prophet just as the moon is superior to millions of stars.

The Prophet of Islam has said: "A scholar is decidedly superior to a devout person in the same manner in which the moon is superior to the stars".

The Prophet has praised wisdom because it is wisdom which endeavours to find out ways and means for the welfare of the people. One can do good to the people only by means of wisdom. The Prophet says: "An hour's reflection is better than a year's worship". (In some traditions it has been said that it is better than seventy years' worship).

Islam has paid full attention to the welfare of human society and its unity and order, as well as to its means of livelihood, and has drawn the attention of the people to the bounties of the earth and the blessings of work. "Almighty God has created all the gifts of the earth for you. The earth has been created for the creatures. It is God who has subjected the earth to you. Walk on its paths and eat the provisions made available to you by God". (67:15)

Islam has made it obligatory for man to thank others. One can be thankful to God only when one thanks others, because one who does not recognise the creatures cannot recognise God.

'One who has not thanked the people has not thanked God'.

The Prophet has praised useful activities very much. He has not contented himself with praising such activities but has also treated worth kissing those hands which are swollen due to excessive work. He says: "This is the hand which is liked by God and His Prophet".

The following narration goes to show how great the Prophet considered the useful tasks and the measures of public welfare:

The companions of the Prophet saw a well-built man and wished that he might have spent his strength by way of jihad in the path of God. Thereupon the Prophet said: "If this person has come out to serve his weak and aged parents it is a task in the path of God. If he has come out to earn for his children this is also a task in the path of God. If he has come out to earn for his wife so as to protect her from illegal things this too is a task in the path of God. And if he has come out to earn something for himself so that

he may not have to beg is also a task in the path of God".

The books of Hadith contain many traditions of the Prophet which show that he appreciated work very much and had great regards for those who worked hard. He says: "God likes a believer who works and earns. No food is better than that earned with one's own efforts".

Hence, when work is such a valuable thing and is even regarded to be holy it is necessary for us to work with perseverance. When a person works hard he will benefit himself as well as others. His presence in the society will be considered to be auspicious and God will also like him.

The Prophet says: "God likes that when someone of you does a work he should do it properly".

We have said above that Islam has subjected the earth to man. He walks on it and utilises its bounties. The question however, arises as to what attitude Islam adopted in the matter of distribution of these bounties?

Are all the bounties mean for a particular class to the exclusion of others? Is only one group of people entitled to benefit from them, and are others to remain deprived? Or should they be distributed on the basis of efforts and need? Are these bounties to be collected and stored by the kings, the aristocrats, the rich and the usurpers, or should they be divided justly among all persons?

Islam has looked at humanity with the eye of justice and logic and has enacted rational laws for it. It has neither deprived anyone of his share nor given him more than his due. Every effort carries a reward and it is necessary for the society to honour this reward. A good society does not allow that a hard worker should starve, and an idle person should benefit from the proceeds of the former's work. Nor does a good society mean that a worker should not get the reward for his work and an idle and good–for–nothing person should usurp all the bounties, as happened in the societies of the earlier time and as Bani Umayyah endeavoured to do after the advent of Islam viz. that they should enslave all others and utilize their property and play with their lives as they liked.

We find that Islam has prohibited extravagance and improper adornment, especially in a society in which the majority of the people are indigent. Its reason is that if there is extravagance and improper adornment on one side there will be poverty and hunger on the other side and also because none is entitled to usurp the proceeds of the efforts of others; and life of pleasure in a poor society is possible only when some persons feed themselves on the proceeds of the efforts of others. The Prophet has treated the houses of the spendthrift persons to be the abodes of Satan. He says: "The houses of the devils are cages which have been covered by the people with silk and brocade".

The Qur'an says:

"There were many cities whose residents were drowned in pleasure. We annihilated them and their houses were ruined. None was left to reside there except a few...". (28:58)

At another place the Qur'an warns the people in a very eloquent manner and says:

"When We wish to destroy a city We order its pleasure-loving citizens to become libertines (i.e. We provide them the means of the life of luxury and pleasure) so that they may become deserving of annihilation and then We destroy that city". (17:16)

Islam has prohibited living a life of pleasure and extravagance while one lives amongst the indigent, as it disheartens them, and has obstructed all paths leading towards it. Tyranny and oppression by the governors and the officials was one such path. The Prophet prohibited and declared unlawful hoarding, taking work from the labourers without paying wages, becoming owner of land without doing anything to develop it, usurping the property of others, and other similar acts of oppression. He said about hoarding: "One who hoards is a sinner".

The Prophet of Islam warned of terrible torture to those who usurp land and said: "Almighty God will put a chain of the seven layers of land round the neck of a person who usurps the lands of others".

He also said: "One who usurps the property of others will meet God on the Day of Judgment in such circumstances that He will be annoyed with him".

Islam has prohibited all kinds of usury. The Qur'an says about usury:

"O believers! Do not go on consuming compound interest". (3:130)

At another place it says:

".. Allah has allowed business and disallowed usury..". (2:275)

Usurers have been warned of severe torture, because it is a sort of forced labour and amounts to enslaving others". 1

Justice means that one should get wages equal to one's work. If the people do not usurp the property of others and do not hoard the commodities to earn large profit wealth cannot become centred in a few hands.

If man and his hard work had been given their due importance in the society, servitude and slavery would not have become current. As opposed to corrupt societies in which man's worth was assessed keeping in view his wealth Islam has a much higher criterion for assessing the worth of man.

The worst sin which can be committed in a society is this that the government and the profiteers should unite to exploit the weak and helpless people. The Qur'an says:

"Do not eat one another's property unlawfully nor give bribes to the rulers so that you may misappropriate whatever you can out of the property of others, although you know". (2: 188)

The Prophet has said: "No food is better than that earned with one's own hands".

In Surah al-Zilzal of the Qur'an it has been said:

"Whoever does something evil equal to an atom will see its result". (99:8)

It has been said: "Every person is pledged to his actions".

Although Islam has acknowledged wealth as personal property, the Islamic laws have been formulated in such a way that wealth may not be concentrated in a few hands and they may not enjoy all its benefits and humiliate others and subject them to forced labour. The Holy Qur'an says:

".. So that wealth may not become a plaything in the hands of your rich..". (59:7)

Thus according to the Qur'an and Hadith the wealth belongs, in the first instance, to the community, and the members of the community can utilize it according to their needs and efforts. It is for this reason that usurpation of other people's property has been disallowed in Islam and hoarding of surplus property has also been prohibited.

This was the basis of the Prophet's fiscal policy and he set examples in this behalf by his words and actions, which must be followed. 2

Rafa'a bin Zaid was one of the dear companions of the Prophet. In one of the battles he was killed with an arrow. People came to the Prophet to condole Rafa'a's death and said: "O Prophet of God! Rafa'a was lucky. He died a martyr's death. By these words they wanted to console the Prophet, but he was not consoled and said: "Certainly not. The turban which he took out of the booty of Khaybar is still a flame like fire".

Notwithstanding the fact that Rafa'a had been killed while performing jihad the Prophet treated him to be a sinner because he had taken something very insignificant out of public property, of his own accord, although he ought to have waited till the property was divided.

The attitude adopted by Islam towards the usurpers and the profiteers can be judged from the fact that it has attached great importance to human life. Only a living person is the spirit of this universe and God has created all things for him. In the circumstances how can he be deprived of life and means of livelihood and how can it be possible to permit some persons to deprive others of the means of livelihood because of their being stronger than them?

In the eyes of the Prophet of Islam wealth is meant to ensure comfortable life for all human beings. Just as human beings have equal rights to utilize sunlight and air in the same way they have equal rights over the means of life which are the products of sunlight and air and none is entitled to deprive others of these benefits.

The Prophet has said: "All persons have equal rights over three things viz. water, vegetation and fire". To whichever community a person may belong matters little; for he is entitled to enjoy the fruits of his

labour. Every member of human brotherhood is under obligation to help others, and all of them must make collective efforts for the reformation and improvement of their affairs.

It is the duty of human brotherhood to recognize the rights of the individuals and give them full freedom to earn their livelihood so that they may work according to their capabilities and enjoy the proceeds of their labour. It is also necessary for the members of the society to help others and not to make their own freedom an obstacle in their path. It is neither permissible for the human brotherhood to oppress the individuals nor is it permissible for the individuals to harm the brotherhood.

It is necessary for the individuals to keep in mind the welfare of others in the same manner in which they take care of their own welfare. The Prophet has said: "Every one of you is a guardian and every one of you will be answerable for his wards. None is entitled to harm others". The Prophet has explained this point with a very fine example as narrated below:

Some persons boarded a boat and every one of them occupied his seat. In the meantime one of them rose from his seat, picked up an axe and began making a hole at the place which was occupied by him. On others having asked him what he was going to do he replied that it was his seat and he was at liberty to do there whatever he liked. Thereupon others held him by the hands and thus saved him as well as themselves from drowning. If that man had been left to himself he as well as others would have been drowned.

It is obligatory for every person to prevent evil in whichever form it may be committed, and to make efforts to ensure the welfare of the society. The Prophet has said: "Whoever sees something evil being done must stop it".

The Prophet of Islam explained to his followers every now and then that good morals take birth from practical training and not only from verbal recommendations and advice. People should be shown kindness practically and not only verbally. The Prophet did not remain aloof from the people; he mixed with them freely, heard patiently what they said, and served them as all great persons do.

Abu Hurayra says: "Once I accompanied the Prophet to the bazaar. He purchased some things from a shop-keeper and advised him to take only reasonable profit on the sale of his merchandise, not to hoard things, not to earn anything by unlawful means, and not to think that he was entitled to comfortable life whereas others were not".

Abu Hurayra wanted to carry the things purchased by the Prophet, but he stopped him from doing so, and said with a smile: "Leave the things. Their owner has a prior right to carry them".

The Prophet always mistrusted the kings and did not give them any position in the society because they are corrupt and also corrupt others. The Almighty God says:

"When the kings enter a city they destroy it and humiliate its respectable persons". (27:34)

One of the events which show that the Prophet did not like glorification is this that on the day on which his son Ibrahim died a solar eclipse took place. Thereupon the people said that sky was also mourning the death of the Prophet's son. When the Prophet heard this sentence he addressed the people with these words: "The sun and the moon are the signs of God. They are not eclipsed because of the death of any person".

The Prophet's teachings consisted of this that one should spend one's life in as simple a manner as possible, and there should be no intricacy or formality in it. This way of leading life is the basis of Islam. If Islamic problems are studied carefully it appears that all the problems have emerged from one source which is very deep and covers all problems. That source is simplicity untainted with fraud, or deceit or in other words `sincerity with life'.

Once the Prophet hit a bedouin unintentionally with a stick. He then insisted that the bedouin should also hit him in the same manner. He mounted the pulpit and said: "Whomsoever I may have hit on his back should take revenge from me and if I have taken the property of anyone he should compensate himself out of my property".

The Prophet had never hurt anyone. However, what he said was sincerity towards life which he manifested in the best manner.

Just as his life was free from hypocrisy and weakness it was also untainted with pride. He mended his own shoes, and clothes, milked his goats, helped the members of his family in household matters, carried bricks along with his companions and tied stones on his belly on account of hunger.

This was sincerity towards life which is confirmed by all the narrations quoted above with regard to the Prophet. As regards the rulers they have to shoulder so many responsibilities that they have to become the servants of the society and not oppressive and rebellious chiefs or thieves or dacoits.

The biography of the Prophet shows that once the residents of some place complained that the governor posted there had taken presents and gifts from the people. He investigated the matter, and it transpired that the complaint was true. He was very much annoyed upon this, summoned the governor and asked him: "Why did you take things to which you were not entitled?" The governor replied: "O Prophet of God! Those were presents".

The Prophet said: "Supposing that you had stayed on at home would the people have come to give you presents?"

He then ordered the governor to deposit the property in question into the public treasury and also removed him from the office.

Thus the Prophet directed the people not to give bribes and also told the officer not to indulge in such nefarious activities. As he had been appointed the ruler of the people he should have been like a father to them and not like a robber.

When the Prophet was so much annoyed at the governor accepting presents it can very well be imagined how much he must have been annoyed when wealth was looted and the rights of the people were encroached upon.

In Islam a ruler is appointed by the selection, and under the authority of the people <u>3</u> and he rules the people according to their wishes. He is always anxious about the welfare of the people. Islam has made it necessary for the rulers to consult their subjects in important matters, the proper solution whereof is difficult. As the Qur'an says:

"They perform their tasks with mutual consultation". (42:38)

The caliph is not entitled to appropriate the property of the people without their consent, nor is he competent to make any law, because all the requisite laws are those which have already been enacted by Islam, and he is entitled only to safeguard the lives, property and honour of the citizens. It is not permissible for a ruler to neglect oppressed persons, and not to protect their rights from the transgression of the tyrants.

It is also not proper for a ruler to wait for the oppressed person to come up to him with a complaint. On the contrary it is his duty to go and help the oppressed person himself, because it is possible that the oppressed person may not pick up courage to make a complaint or may not be able to find his way to the ruler. Islam has severely reproached an oppressed person who silently bears oppression and humiliation and has said that such a person is cruel to himself. Islam has commended one's efforts to defend one's life, property and honour.

The Prophet has said: "One who gives up his life opposing oppression and tyranny is a martyr".

The Prophet has also said: "If people see a tyrant committing oppression and do not hold his hand it is likely that all of them may become subjected to Divine torture".

Islam has considered all human beings to be the brothers of one another. It has also campaigned against religious fanaticism. The Qur'an says:

"There is no compulsion in the matter of faith". (2:256)

It has put up the toughest fight against family or tribal bias. The Prophet has said: "Man is the brother of man, whether he likes it or not".

The Qur'an says:

"We have bestowed dignity upon human beings, provided them with means of transport on land and water, given them pure things to eat and given them superiority over many creatures". (17:70)

Whenever the Prophet addressed the people his address was meant for all human beings whether

Arabs or non-Arabs and whether white, yellow or black. He addressed them as kind and sympathetic, brothers of one another joined together with the relationship of humanity and irrespective of their nationality etc. If there was any difference between them it was on the basis of good deeds and not on account of colour or race.

The Prophet has said: "O people! Your Lord is One. You have also a common ancestor Adam. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab and no non-Arab is superior to an Arab and similarly no red-coloured person is superior to a white-coloured person and no white-coloured person is superior to a red-coloured person. And if a person enjoys superiority over others it is on account of his piety. Those of you who are present should convey this message to those who are absent".

- 1. There is great difference between usury and trade. The traders procure the provisions from appropriate place at cheaper rates. Every person cannot do this. The traders take these commodities to suitable markets for sale. At times they earn some profit and at other times they sustain loss. That is not the case with the usury. The money–lender does not make any efforts, is not contented with a small profit and does not sustain any loss. Hence the difference between the two kinds of transactions is evident.
- 2. Those who have studied the Qur'an are aware that Islam neither supports the condemned capitalism nor the unnatural communist system. It acknowledges the institution of individual ownership so that every person may make the best use of his capabilities. As only legal restrictions are not sufficient for economic reform Islam has also endeavoured to attain this object by moral training. This is the main difference between the material systems and Islam. Communism binds our entire existence with law and a as a result thereof we are reduced to a machine. Consequently we cannot use our will and determination and they wear away gradually.
- 3. This form of government is accepted by all Muslim sects, with the difference that the Shi'a regard it as justified only during the occultation of the Imam of the Age. Otherwise the Shi'a give preference to those who were appointed or designated by the Prophet and the Imams. But according to the Sunnis immediately on the death of the Prophet, this form became the only right form of the government.

From the Shi'a point of view, since the major occultation of Mahdi, the Imam of the Age in 329 A.H. no particular person has been appointed to be the head and leader of the Muslim ummah.

That is why in the traditions related to leadership during this period only the general qualities and characteristics required to be possessed by a leader have been mentioned. This shows that it is upto the people themselves to choose a person as their leader, having following qualities and characteristics:

- * Faith in God, His revelations and the teachings of His Prophet.
- * Integrity, adherence to the laws of Islam, and earnestness about their enforcement.
- * Adequate knowledge of Islam, appropriate to his prominent position.
- * Enough competence for holding such a position and freedom from every defect not in keeping with Islamic leadership. His standard of living being equal to that of the low-income people.

In this connection there is enough material in the sermons of Ali and in the epistles he sent to his officials. In a number of epistles it has been emphasized that an administrative officer should be free from love of money, ignorance, inefficiency, outrage, timidness, bribery, and violation of Islamic injunctions and traditions and should not be guilty of shedding blood. (For further details see: "Philosophy of Islam" ISP, 1982).

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