

Shi'ah Doctrine of Rulership

With reference to the Shi'ah doctrine of rulership it may be pointed out that the Shi'ah believe that the choice of the successor of the Prophet (S) does not rest in the hands of the Ummah, for God Himself selects the successors of prophets.

According to them the Prophet (S) explicitly indicated his choice under the instruction of revelation that 'Ali would succeed him as the leader of Muslims. A group of the Prophet's Companions and most of his blood relations did not agree with the choice of the first caliph. But 'Ali (A) and his supporters, including 'Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, agreed to suppress their differences in order to maintain the unity of the Ummah.

At the time of the choice of the second and third caliphs also, 'Ali (A) considered himself to be the most qualified candidate for the office, but he readily cooperated with all the three caliphs despite his sharp differences, particularly with regard to the appointment of governors and the distribution of *bayt al-mal* income. After 'Ali (A) was compelled by the majority of the Muslim world to accept the caliphate, Mu'awiyah raised the issue of *qisas* of 'Uthman and made it a powerful weapon for realizing his political ambitions.

Here we do not wish to dabble in this controversy, but it was at this juncture that the Muslims were divided into two fighting factions. Both were called 'shi'ah', i.e. the shi'ah of 'Uthman or Mu'awiyah and the shi'ah of 'Ali (A). Mu'awiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'As succeeded in dividing the supporters of 'Ali (A) into two factions at the pretext of arbitration (*tahkim*) by the Quran. Those who opposed arbitration separated from the ranks of 'Ali's Shi'ah and were called '*khawarij*'.

Though after the tragedy of Karbala' no Imam of the Prophet's Family contended for the caliphate, some individuals of the family of the Prophet (S) and 'Ali (A) led armed revolts against the tyrannical rule of Banu Umayyah and later Banu al-'Abbas, and made unsuccessful attempts to establish the rule of God upon the earth. Imam 'All ibn Musa al-Rida (A) was declared crown prince by al-Ma'mun ibn al-Rashid, but was poisoned later.

The Imams of the family of the Prophet (S) remained content with their work of developing Islamic

sciences and providing spiritual guidance to Muslims, and did not consider time to be opportune for establishing a truly Islamic state.

Nevertheless, they were imprisoned and poisoned by the ruling families, which was an indication that they were regarded as potential threat to monarchies, as they were considered to be more qualified claimants to leadership. The common belief that the Imams were indifferent to politics is not true. Had they been neutral, what was the reason for being afraid of them?

The Shi'ah in general followed the footsteps of their Imams (A); they opposed unjust rule but supported the just rulers, and even cooperated with those whom they disliked when the cause of Islam was threatened by external forces.

Enayet, with reference to al-Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 460/1068) and al-Shaykh al-Mufid (337-413/949-1022) and Ibn Idris (d. 598/1202), writes that they recommended paying of allegiance to righteous rulers (*al-sultan al-haqq al-'adil*) irrespective of their own allegiance to any school of Islamic faith.

Practically the Shi'ah also took into consideration political exigencies of the times, but they did not make any attempt to legitimize exigencies. It is only in this sense that the Sunnis showed greater flexibility and displayed a sense of political realism as compared to the Shi'ah. Most of other generalizations made by Enayet are controvertible.

At the end of the introduction, the author says that the present Islamic resurgence, Sunni as well as Shi'i; is focused on four themes: breaking the spell of the sanctity of status quo; rejecting the corrupting realism of medieval writers; historical criticism; and salvaging the democratic and socialistic elements of the past. Of course, many eyebrows would rise at the mention of the term 'socialistic', but as Enayet has discussed socialistic elements of Islamic teachings in the fourth chapter of his book, we should not be afraid of using it.

Mutahhari and some other modern but orthodox thinkers maintain that all attempts of reconciliation between Islam and socialism are futile and deviate from true Islam. And this claim is not unjustified, for the craze of incorporating new terminology in the body of any older philosophy is often an exercise in futility. However, the values cherished by modern philosophies of democracy and socialism were introduced and implemented by true Muslims many centuries before these movements came into vogue.

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