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Part 3: Caliphate of Amirul Momineen

Praise be to Allah for His favor. The right returned to its owner.
(Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib)

Imam 'Ali (a) was supported by divine help. He remained patient in spite of troubles. Even though he saw his right being usurped, he did not turn away from working for the benefit of Muslims. He did not fight the three caliphs keeping in mind the well-being of Islam. He used to give his precious advices in the interest of Islam wherever required.

It was natural that after Uthman's murder, Imam 'Ali (a) should have presented himself for Caliphate and have tried all possible means for it. However Imam 'Ali (a) was such an elevated personality that he did not try to gain Caliphate in such a situation also even though Islamic Ummah was forcing him to take charge. Imam 'Ali (a) did not require Caliphate, instead the Caliphate required Imam 'Ali (a).

Tabari narrates the story of Caliphate of 'Ali as follows: Emigrants and Helpers gathered after Uthman's murder. Talha and Zubair were also among them. All of them came to Imam 'Ali (a) and told him: "We want to pay allegiance to you."

He replied: "I don't want your kingdom and I don't care whom you appoint."

They said: "We would not appoint anyone, except you."

Imam 'Ali (a) rejected their offer. After that, Emigrants and Helpers came to Imam 'Ali (a) a number of times and requested him to take charge.

On 18th Zilhajj, Imam 'Ali (a) had gone to the market. People surrounded him and requested him to take the charge of Caliphate.

Imam 'Ali (a) broke himself away from them and went to the orchard of Bani Amr ibn Mabdhool. There was a high wall surrounding this orchard. Imam 'Ali (a) ordered Abi Amr ibn Umar ibn Mohsin to shut the gate. The people had gathered outside the gate and they were knocking it.

When the door opened, the crowd of Emigrants and Helpers surged in. Talha and Zubair again requested Imam ‘Ali (a) to take Caliphate and requested him to stretch his hands so that they could pay allegiance to him.

One of Talha’s hands was paralyzed and when he paid allegiance, Habib ibn Zuaib said: “The allegiance began with a paralyzed hand!”[1]

After taking allegiance from the people, Imam ‘Ali (a) delivered a sermon explaining the features of his rule as follows:

Almighty Allah has revealed the book of guidance. He has narrated good and evil in it. You should accept the good and shun evil and fulfill your duties.

“O servants of God! Fear Allah for His servants and cities. You will be interrogated regarding them. You will be asked about your animals also.”[2]

This sermon of Imam ‘Ali (a) has a few statements but he explained all the rights and duties of the subjects. History proves that Imam ‘Ali (a) did not have any greed for power. He rejected the offer to take the charge of government. When the insistence of people increased, he said:

“Leave me and seek someone else. We are facing a matter which has (several) faces and colors, which neither hearts can stand nor intelligence can accept. Clouds are hovering over the sky, and faces are not discernible. You should know that if I respond to you, I would lead you as I know and would not care about whatever one may say or abuse.”[3]

In spite of this, when people continued to insist, Imam ‘Ali (a) accepted this religious duty and shocked the people by saying: “I am responsible for every statement of mine. Piety does not allow those who have learnt a lesson to have a doubt. Bear it in mind that your test has begun from today in the same way as it was during the early days of Islam.

I swear by one who appointed the Prophet, you will have to face severe tests and you will be sieved using a filter of examination. The whip of death will overpower you, till the mean ones among you become elevated and the elevated among you become mean. Those who are left behind move ahead and those who move ahead will be left behind.”[4]

Imam said the above because he knew that people had stopped respecting truth and started worshipping wealth. Hence they would not be able to bear a just government and would cease to benefit as a result. They would then oppose him but will not be able to dismiss him by writing a letter.

Imam had depicted the picture of people’s insistence and his rejection in the following words: “You drew out my hand towards you for allegiance, but I held it back and you stretched it but I contracted it. Then you crowded over me as thirsty camels crowd at the watering holes, so much so that shoes were torn, shoulder-cloths fell away and the weak got trampled”[5]

This is also explained in another sermon by him as follows:

“At that moment, nothing took me by surprise, but the crowd of people rushing to me. It advanced towards me from every side like the mane of the hyena; so much so that Hasan and Husain were getting crushed and both ends of my cloak were torn. They collected around me like a herd of sheep and goats. When I took up the reins of government, one party broke away and another turned disobedient while the rest began acting wrongfully.”6

1. Tarikh al-Umam wal Muluk, Vol. 5, Pg. 152-153
2. Ibn Abil Hadid, Sharh Nahjul Balagha, Vol. 3, Pg. 157
3. Ibn Abil Hadid, Sharh Nahjul Balagha, Vol. 2, Pg. 170
4. Ibn Abil Hadid, Sharh Nahjul Balagha, Vol. 1, Pg. 90
5. Ibn Abil Hadid, Sharh Nahjul Balagha, Vol. 3, Pg. 181
6. Ibn Abil Hadid, Sharh Nahjul Balagha, Vol. 1, Pg. 67

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