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Helping the needy

There are those common rights which were respected by Ali himself and he also impressed upon others to respect them. According to him the real duty of the governors of the provinces and other officials was that they should protect these rights and should not allow them to be encroached upon.

If Ali appointed anyone as a ruler or removed him from his office, it was for this very reason. According to him these rights carried very wide meanings and were of many kinds. The purport of all of them was, however, that the needs of every person should be met and no one should remain hungry, because remaining hungry is the greatest insult to humanity.

There is no harm in violating the laws which cannot eliminate the indigence of the people. Just as in the creed of Ali worship must not estrange man from the society and religion means good behaviour towards the people, and true religious beliefs are those which promote righteousness, in the same manner the laws should be such as meet the needs of the people and ensure elimination of poverty and indigence, so that man may not be humiliated in his own eyes and become dejected.

It is not a favour but the duty of a ruler and a law-giver to enact laws which relieve the people of need and indigence, and they are entitled to demand such laws from him.

Ali safeguarded the rights of the people so meticulously that it is almost impossible to find any sermon, speech or testament of his in which he may not have mentioned these rights and may not have drawn the attention of the governors and the officials to them. Meeting the needs of the people was undoubtedly the greatest duty of the ruler and the law–giver and the greatest right of the people in the eyes of Ali.

It was Ali who considered the greatest sin of Kaiser and Kisra to be this (although the list of their sins is quite long) that they humiliated their subjects, did not look after their rights, deprived them of the bounties of the earth and the comforts of life and tried to make them indigent and despicable. He says: "Think over the agitation and distress of the people when Kaiser and Kisra were their rulers. They had expelled them from fertile lands and the water and verdure of Iraq and transferred them to a place where there was no vegetation and where there was nothing except violent winds, and had made them

extremely poor and indigent.

Whenever a governor or an official committed breach of trust of public property (whether the amount involved was small or large) Ali threatened him with severe punishment. He was deeply grieved as and when he came to know that a governor or an official had usurped a property or had been guilty of hoarding, and he reprimanded him in very severe terms. He once wrote thus to a governor: "I understand that you have usurped the land belonging to the public treasury and have appropriated what was under your feet and eaten what was in your hands. You should, therefore, send me your account".

The sentence "Send me your account" in the letter of the Commander of the Faithful deserves attention. This sentence carries very vast meanings. He was so keen to enforce justice that he could not tolerate any excuse or slackness in this behalf.

Besides possessing a firm faith Ali was a subtle observer and was fully aware of the mysteries of human society, and the mutual relations of the public. He knew which rights had been encroached upon, and which of them were going to be encroached upon. He fully realized that injustice and oppression was harmful for the society internally as well as externally and the oppressors as well as the oppressed were threatened with grave dangers. He considered pleading for justice and administration of justice to be necessary even though it might be disliked by the governors and the officials. He wrote with much annoyance: "Send me your account".

He was informed about another governor having misappropriated public property. He wrote to him immediately as under:

"Fear God and return the property of the people to them. If you do not do so and then God grants me control over you I shall acquit myself of my responsibilities in the matter and shall strike you with my sword, and whoever has been the victim of it has always gone direct to Hell. By God, even if Hasan and Husayn had done what you have done I would not have been lenient to them and they would not have been able to make me accede to any wish of theirs till I had taken back the right (of others) from them and had effaced the results arising out of injustice".

The Commander of the Faithful sent a man named Sa'd to Ziad bin Abih to bring some money which was lying with him. The Commander of the Faithful had received information that Ziad was leading a luxurious life and that he was accumulating wealth himself and did not give anything to the widows, the orphans and the indigent. When Sa'd approached Ziad and demanded the money the latter behaved proudly and rebuked him. Sa'd came back and informed Ali about what had happened.

Thereupon Ali wrote a letter to Ziad on these lines: "Sa`d has informed me that you have rebuked him without any justification and behaved with him haughtily and proudly, notwithstanding the fact that the Prophet has said that greatness belongs to God only and whoever is proud incurs His wrath. Sa`d has also informed me that you eat food of various kinds and perfume yourself every day. What harm will accrue to you if you also fast for a few days for the sake of God and give away a part of your wealth as

charity in the path of God, and eat many times the food which you eat once, or let an indigent person eat it.

You, who are rolling in bounties, do not look after your poor neighbours, the weak and needy widows and the orphans. Do you desire, inspite of all this, that you should get the reward of the righteous persons who give alms? Sa`d has also told me that you speak like the righteous but act like the evildoer? If you really do so you have been cruel to yourself and have wasted your actions. You should repent before God and reform your ways and should be moderate in your acts. You should send forward whatever surplus property you possess for the day on which you will need it, in case you are a true believer. And use perfume on alternate days and that should not be too much. The Prophet has said: "Use perfume on alternate days and do not use it excessively. Peace be on you".

The Commander of the Faithful sent successive orders to the governors and warned them severely against misappropriating public property and taking bribes. He considered such activities to be the worst relationship between the rulers and the ruled and a great barrier between title and the entitled person. He was well aware of the harm which these bad habits were likely to do to the people.

Once he received information that a military officer had taken bribe. He held his hand and gave it such a violent jerk that it was about to be dismembered from his body. Then he said to him: "The people earlier than you were annihilated because they deprived the people of their rights and they were, therefore, obliged to acquire their rights by offering bribes. They compelled the people to do invalid things as a result of which falsehood became prevalent".

Once a governor was invited to a feast. The governor accepted the invitation and participated in the party. When the Commander of the Faithful came to know about this he reprimanded the governor severely saying: "Entertaining a governor is bribe. Why was this bribe given? If it was given to establish a right it is the duty of a governor to give the entitled persons their right without taking bribe, or this bribe was given to validate something invalid. If that be the case it is not lawful for a governor to do any such thing even though the entire world may be offered to him as bribe.

The second thing is: why did the governor participate in a feast to which the rich were invited but the indigent were ignored and thus discrimination was made between the slaves of Allah? This discrimination pained many persons and also grieved Ali. Of course if the society is prosperous and the people are well-to-do there is no harm in inviting only some persons to a party to the exclusion of others. However, when the conditions are such that there are poor as well as rich persons in the society, does the extension of an invitation to a governor to participate in a feast not amount to giving him bribe?

Some persons may think that such severity on the part of Ali with regard to the governors and the officials was not appropriate and they did not deserve to be censured and reprimanded in this manner. However, if such persons become aware of the facilities provided by Ali to the officers which made it absolutely unnecessary for them to take bribes or to resort to misappropriation of funds they will

acknowledge that the severity expressed by Ali towards the officials was not unjustified.

Another point also deserves attention here and it is that Ali did not consider it permissible that the officials should take advantage of their position vis–a–vis the public even to the extent of a feast, because such an advantage also amounts to theft or bribe. And when Ali did not permit an officer to accept an invitation to a feast by way of bribe, how could be tolerate that he should appropriate a whole city to himself or should take the property of the people from them by way of bribe?

A far-sighted person who has an eye on the realities is obliged to be severe and to nip the evil in the bud. Restraint on the officials commenced in the days of Ali and not during the period of Uthman. Ali gave such handsome salaries to the governors as were sufficient for their needs. There could, therefore, be no justification for their taking bribes.

If Ali was severe with the corrupt officers he was also affable with the righteous ones. He acknowledged their rights and encouraged them for their devotion towards their Imam and for their services to the Muslims.

The letter which he wrote to Umar son of Abi Salma, the governor of Bahrain whereby relieving him of his assignment and asking him to come over to him to accompany him in the Syrian campaign, deserves to be studied. He wrote to him: "I have entrusted the governorship of Bahrain to No`man son of Ajlan Zarqi and have relieved you of it. However, I have not done this because you have been considered to be incompetent or because you have been accused of anything improper.

The fact is that you have run the administration very competently and faithfully. You should, therefore, come over here and join me. There is nothing against you. The actual position is this that I have decided to proceed against the Syrian rebels and wish that you should be with me because you are one of those persons who can assist me in fighting against the enemy and erecting the pillar of the faith".

He always adopted this firm policy with regard to the officers. He encouraged those who were righteous and was severe to those who did evil deeds. He neither wavered, nor minced words nor resorted to connivance or deceit. His real object was the welfare of the Muslims and the establishment of justice among all, whether they were the rulers or the ruled.

Those officers who did not misappropriate public funds and did not take bribe received salaries from the public treasury according to their needs, and the Commander of the Faithful praised and encouraged them. As regards the dishonest officers, however, Ali reprimanded and censured them in the first instance and then dismissed them. In case their crimes were more serious he also sentenced them to imprisonment.

Besides the governors there were some persons who had usurped the property of others and had accumulated large amount of wealth by unlawful means. The Commander of the Faithful subjected them to severe accountability and did not show them any leniency. He severely opposed their greed to

accumulate wealth and their sensual and luxurious life, and endeavoured to become a wall between them and their wealth which they were keen to increase.

He opposed verbally as well as practically the usurpation of the property of others and severely prohibited hoarding. In the testament addressed to Malik Ashtar he wrote inter alia: "Keep this also in mind that many of these persons are habituated to parsimony and stinginess. They hoard to make profit and weigh lesser and charge more. This thing is harmful for the public and a defect of the rulers. You should, therefore, prevent them from hoarding".

Then he says: "If someone is guilty of hoarding after your having prohibited it you should punish him, but you must ensure that no excess or oppression is done in your action".

As regards occupation of estates and land by the people the view held by Ali was compatible with reason as well as a source of virtue. We have already discussed this matter in the foregoing pages.

Subjecting others to forced labour and exploiting their earnings is also a kind of hoarding. Ali did not tolerate this also, and has mentioned it at various places in Nahj al-Balaghah. While describing the condition of the people of his time he says: "There are many persons whose endeavours have been wasted and whose efforts have gone in vain. You people are living in a time when goodness is receding and wickedness coming nearer and nearer. Satanic avarice is killing the people. Wherever you cast your eye you will see indigent persons, who are suffering on account of poverty, or the rich who are guilty of ingratitude to God, or the stingy persons who do not pay God's dues and are keen to increase their wealth. What has happened to your righteous and pious people? Where are those noble and magnanimous persons, who were pious in earning wealth and pure in their actions and conduct?"

In fact the Commander of the Faithful had clearly understood this reality by means of his correct thinking, pure disposition and high morality that a system which cannot eliminate the indigence of the people is worthless and a law which cannot do away with class discrimination is useless and undesirable. All those social laws, which give birth to a society, in which people are divided into classes, are a plaything in the hands of those, who call themselves the nobles and the dignitaries and exploit the rights and property of the common man in a most shameless manner.

Ali took positive steps to eliminate the poverty of the people. His actions were based on two principles: Firstly that the entire wealth of the public treasury and the lands and property and all means of earning wealth belong to the nation and it is necessary that they should be distributed among all the citizens according to their needs and entitlement. Every person should work and benefit from these resources according to his efforts. None is entitled to appropriate whatever he likes and to convert the public property into his special property. It is also in the interest of the individuals that they should co-operate with the society. They should prove themselves useful for others and should also benefit from them. The benefits which they will derive from the society will be thousands of times more than those which they render to the society.

Ali says: "Whoever withholds his hand from doing harm to his people apparently withholds only one hand but actually keeps thousands of hands away from himself".

The government should adopt this just policy in right earnest because the people are like a body and it is necessary for the government to treat every limb of that body according to its needs. It should neither ignore anyone, nor neglect the right of anyone, nor permit any discrimination between them. It is in such circumstances that it can become possible for the government to realize revenue and obtain other rights of the public treasury from the nation and spend it on the projects of public welfare.

The second thing on which Ali based his actions was the development of land, because the life of human beings and their welfare depend on land. He was of the view that the governors and officers should take much greater interest in the development of land as compared with the effort which they make to realize government revenue, because if land is not developed from where will the revenue come?

A ruler who does not develop land, but wants to realize revenue from the public, is ignorant and unjust. He desires that the cities should be destroyed, the people should be ruined and he himself should lose his dignity and honour. The land is neither developed automatically nor by means of the ignorance or power of the rulers. Development of land does not also mean that magnificent palaces should be erected on it to accommodate rich people. Land is developed with the efforts of the labourers and the residents of villages. The Commander of the Faithful had given strict instructions that if the people were distressed and were not happy with their rulers, revenue should not be realized from them.

The principles of kindness to the subjects and philanthropy and the moral values demand that the subjects should pay the revenue voluntarily and not under duress. It is the duty of governors to make the subjects prosperous in the first instance and then to think of collecting the revenue. The Commander of the Faithful has addressed the collectors of revenue in these words: "........ Don't sell the winter or summer clothings of the people or the animals used by them, in order to collect revenue. Don't flog any person or make him stand on his feet for the sake of money, and don't sell any of their things for this purpose, because God has ordered us to take that which is surplus".

He also says: "In the matter of revenue keep in view the interests of those who pay the revenue, because the affairs of others can be set right only by means of taxes and the tax-payers".

These views of the Commander of the Faithful about land and its development and the conclusion drawn by him that the welfare of government depends on the welfare of the people are so true and correct that nothing wrong about them has been found even after the lapse of so many centuries. All the economic and social theories of the modern times also confirm these views.

Ali prescribed a general rule for the development of land and the extraction of wealth from its heart which is admitted by the social sciences of our time, to be absolutely correct.

During the age of ignorance there was a custom that the powerful persons forced the slaves, prisoners and subordinates to develop their lands. They gave these workers paltry wages at their own sweet will but appropriated the produce of the land themselves without having done any work.

According to their law man did not carry any value and his labour did not deserve any reward. The rulers considered the people to be their slaves and subjected them to forced labour. Their very religion was based on making people their slaves or in other words on killing and destroying those helpless and afflicted persons. The people were ignorant and the rulers, taking undue advantage of their ignorance, made them their slaves.

The idolatrous priests, who were the religious leaders of those times had also declared slavery to be lawful and had thus strengthened the hands of the rulers. These priests had befooled the people in such a way that they were prepared to make supreme sacrifices for the sake of their rulers to enable them to increase their wealth and add new lands to their territories. All this was done either in the name of the homeland or in the name of the deity, whom they worshipped.

The famous British historian H.G. Wells says: "The idolatrous priests told the people that the lands which they tilled did not belong to them. They belonged to the gods whose image they had hung in the temples, and those gods had given those lands to the rulers. Now it depended upon the sweet will of the rulers to give the lands to those servants of theirs whom they liked".

The peasants also began to entertain the belief that the land which they ploughed did not belong to them, but were owned by the god (idol) and it was their duty to surrender a part of the produce of the land to the representative of the god. Or that the god had given the land to the ruler and he was entitled to impose thereon any taxes he liked. Or that the ruler had given the land to the landlord who was their master. If at times the idol, the ruler or the landlord needed the services of the peasant it was his duty to leave other work and carry out the orders of his master. The peasant did not even think that he had any right on the land which he ploughed. In short the peasant neither possessed any freedom of will nor enjoyed any right.

The history of Arabia tells us that the persons who assumed the reins of government after Ali monopolized the lands, their produce, and the public treasury for their personal benefit. They used to say: "The entire wealth belongs to God and we are his representatives and vicegerents on earth. It is our prerogative to give this wealth to whomsoever we like. Nobody is entitled to criticize us in this regard". 1

However, Ali knew the position very well. He was very far-sighted and was well aware that God does not need land or wealth and the land belongs to those who work on it. Ali also knew that if the peasants are indigent the land will become waste and it will be difficult to realize any revenue. Land can be developed only by those people who are its owners and derive profit from its produce. If the peasants know it for certain that they will not be able to enjoy the fruits of their labour and it will reach the treasuries of the extravagant rulers, they will work half-heartedly and will not make any effort to develop

the land. 2 Consequently they themselves will be in distress and others will also be deprived of the fruits of their labour.

In case, however, they know that the more they produce with their hard work the more they themselves and their children will benefit from it, and the rulers too will not distribute the revenue among their friends and relatives, but will spend it on projects of public welfare, they will work whole–heartedly. As a result of this they will become prosperous and additional revenue will also accrue to the government treasury.

In the eyes of the Commander of the Faithful the happiness and goodwill of the subjects was the only source of the welfare of the people as well as the good condition of the rulers. He did not believe in coercion and said: "The best source of satisfaction and heartfelt happiness for a ruler is that justice should be established and the love of the subjects for the rulers should become patent. They do not display love so long as there is ill feeling in their hearts and their devotion cannot be relied upon so long as they are not prepared to defend their ruler and do not cease to think that his rule has been burdensome and it will come to an end after a long time".

Ali considered farming and all other professions to be respectable. He prohibited people from remaining idle and considered it essential that a worker should be paid wages commensurate with his work. He exercised much strictness in these matters so that the people might realize that he was not going to pay anything which had not been earned by the person concerned by means of his work. The incident of his real brother Aqil son of Abu Talib is well known. He approached Ali to make him some payment without any work or service, but Ali declined to accede to his request.

In the eyes of Ali there was no injustice greater than that a worker should not be paid his wages or that he should be deprived of his right even to the smallest extent. According to him it was also highly improper that the work done by persons belonging to the higher class should be applauded whereas that done by the ordinary persons should be looked down upon. According to him what mattered was the work and its real value whether it was done by a big man or an ordinary person.

There were many workers in his time who worked hard but were not rewarded for their labour. The Commander of the Faithful disliked it very much. These words of his are a beacon light in the path of social and moral principles: "Keep eye on the achievement of every person and do not attribute the achievement of one person to another, and do not deprive the real person of the reward to which he is entitled on account of the work done by him. Never treat an ordinary work to be great on account of high position of the doer, and never treat a great work to be ordinary on account of the low position of the person who has done it".

Development of land and payment of full wages, commensurate with the work done, were the two strong pillars on which Ali intended to erect the structure of a good and pious society. Some persons belonging to a particular place came to him and said: "There is a canal in our area which is now filled with dust. If it is dug again it will be very beneficial for us". They then requested him to write to the governor of the

area to make it compulsory for everyone to dig the canal. The Commander of the Faithful approved the digging of the canal but did not accede to their request that the people should be compelled to dig it.

He wrote thus to Qarza son of Kaa`b the governor of the area: "Some persons belonging to your area came to me and told me that there was a canal in that region which is now filled with dust. If these people dig the canal once again it will lead to the development of the area and they will be able to pay the revenue. This will also lead to the increase in the income of the Muslims residing in the area. These persons asked me to write a letter to you desiring you to collect the people of that place to dig the canal and to make it obligatory upon them to bear the expenses of the work.

I do not consider it appropriate to compel any person to do a work which he does not like to do. You should, therefore, call the people and employ those of them who are willing to do the work. When the canal is ready only those persons who do digging work will be entitled to use it, and those who do not participate in the work will have no right on its water. If those people develop their area and their financial position improves, it is much better than their remaining weak".

Ali did not consider it lawful to subject anyone to forced labour, although a group of persons wished to resort to this practice. The thing which matters is that one should work. Ali, therefore, said to those people: "You have been ordered to work (and not to remain idle). As regards the canal only those persons, who participate in its digging, will be entitled to benefit from it. Those who do not want to do this work cannot be compelled to do it. Work should be done willingly and not under coercion". This is the principle which Ali followed very strictly.

By formulating this rule about work and the workers centuries ago Ali surpassed the western thinkers. The western thinkers are putting forth so vehemently the same thing today which was said by Ali thirteen hundred years ago. He provided a basis for justice and a better basis cannot be imagined. 3 And that basis is that none should be subjected to forced labour, however beneficial the work may be, because taking work by force is an insult to humanity. It reduces the value of man and infringes his inherent freedom. Furthermore, work taken under compulsion loses its value, because one who is forced to perform a job will not perform it whole–heartedly.

Ali, however, encouraged the people in another way to do the work by saying that only those persons who participate in digging the canal would be entitled to benefit from it. He said: "The owners of the canal are those persons who participate in digging it and not those who refrain from doing so".4 This principle enunciated by Ali is the pillar on which the greatest beliefs and ideas of the western thinkers are based.

Hence it is necessary for every person to work. None is great or small except through his work. Whoever works shall be rewarded for it. The aristocrats and dignitaries are not entitled to usurp the earnings of others and encroach upon their rights. As said by Ali if God likes any one He likes an honest worker. If a person earns some wealth by hard work it naturally belongs to him because he has worked for it.

However, he must also take the interest of the nation into account. The said property will be treated to be his personal property so long as public interests are not jeopardized. If public interests demand that a part of the personal property of the individuals should be taken and spent for public welfare, this will be done. This wealth is meant for the benefit of the individuals as well as for the welfare of the society (it was on this account that revenue was realized from the owners of the canal for the public treasury) when ownership is circumscribed in this manner there will neither be excessive wealth with anyone nor will there be any indigent person in the society.

In every nation there are certain persons (for example young orphans) who are not able to do any work. Did Ali ignore such persons, as is done by the western countries, or did he take care of them according to the rules of justice and morality?

There is no doubt about the fact that the nation has rights on the individuals and the individuals have rights on the nation. The nation is like a body which is composed of different limbs. It is necessary for every limb to help other limbs. Every person is entitled to enjoy the fruits of his labour. God has given a share of the necessities of life to everyone. None is, therefore, entitled to appropriate the necessities of life to the exclusion of others.

However, it is the responsibility of the nation to support those who are unable to earn, for example small children and old persons. 5 It should do justice to the helpless persons in the same manner in which it does justice to others. It is an exclusive right of theirs, and not an act of kindness and the governments and its representatives are responsible to pay this right. Ali Says: "Out of all members of the society these persons are more deserving of justice. Hence you should pay the right of every one of them and equip yourself with an excuse to be presented before God. Take care of the orphans and the old persons who can neither earn their livelihood nor stand before others to beg".

Ali has gone ahead of thousands of western thinkers and philosophers in this matter. He realized the necessity of paying the rights of the helpless persons and made it a responsibility of the government. He did not let it depend on the kindness and generosity of the rich so that the deceitful hypocrites might not get any chance to spread mischief. 6

Ali's conscience as well as his intellect were well aware of the reality that all human beings are entitled to live. This right is one of the necessities of social life.

Freedom is of no use if sustenance is not available and a good society cannot come into being without it. He promulgated the law that all human beings enjoy equal rights. Then in the light of the same law he decided that the needy persons had preferential rights over the public treasury as compared with the rich persons even though those rich persons might have embraced Islam earlier.

It is work which entitles one to wages and it is also work by means of which one can become the owner of land and property.

In the orders which the Commander of the Faithful sent to the governors and other officers every now and then he strictly warned them not to harass the people. He directed them not to press the indigent peasants for payment of revenue but to render them assistance so that they might work hard and produce more from the land. Taxes should be realized from the rich so that the income of the public treasury might increase and might be used to help the needy.

How great and dignified Ali appears in our eyes when we learn that fourteen hundred years ago he gave emphatic orders to his governors on these lines: "Don't sell the winter or summer dresses of the people, or their cereals, or the animals used by them, to realize revenue. Don't flog any person or make him stand on his feet for the sake of money. Don't sell the household effects of any person to get revenue – and pay more heed to the development of land than to the collection of revenue".

The Commander of the Faithful has mentioned the reason for the distressful condition of the indigent persons of his time in a few brief sentences and has explained their contents in numerous testaments and precepts. He says: "If an indigent person remains hungry it is because the rich man has withheld his share".

This is the greatest reality which is the basis of modern equitable system. All had understood this reality fourteen hundred years ago and formulated clear rules and regulations, as were suited to his time.

A Lebanese writer who happens to be my friend says that at one time he was residing in a big city of Europe and the movement to put an end to poverty was being carried on there. One day he met the Education Minister of that country and said to him during the course of conversation: "We Arabs realized centuries ago the class discrimination and its disadvantages which you are endeavouring to eliminate now".

The Minister said: "How?" He replied: Fourteen hundred years ago Ali son of Abu Talib said: "I have not seen excessive wealth with anyone except that I have seen simultaneously the right of someone being infringed".

The Minister said: "We are much better than you". He said: "How?" The Education Minister said: "Because although an Arab had understood this reality fourteen hundred years ago you have not so far endeavoured to eliminate indigence and are still involved in it whereas we are already endeavouring to get rid of poverty. Hence you are fourteen hundred years behind us .i.e. if we had heard this sentence of Ali at that time we would have taken necessary steps in this behalf immediately".

Before we end this chapter, it will be better to recapitulate what has been stated above and to invite the readers to compare the views of Ali on social matters with those of the modern thinkers and to reflect on them judiciously.

We can mention the social principles and views of Ali in nine sentences. These principles and views consist of the causes of affluence and indigence and the class differences of the people or in other

words the best rules and regulations for eliminating poverty and need, and establishing equality of rights between them.

- (1) Prevent hoarding.
- (2) No indigent person remained hungry except because a rich man usurped his share.
- (3) I have not seen excessive wealth with anyone except that I have seen the right of someone being infringed.
- (4) You should be more anxious to develop land then to collect revenue.
- (5) I do not consider it proper that a person should be compelled to do a work which he does not like.
- (6) The hearts of the pious people are in Paradise and their bodies are busy doing work in the world.
- (7) The canal belongs to him who participated in its digging and not to him who did not provide physical or financial assistance to dig it.
- (8) Keep in view the achievement of a person, and do not attribute the achievements of one person to another.
- (9) Beware! Don't appropriate to yourselves the things in which all have equal rights.

If these sentences of Ali are studied carefully it becomes known that the rights of man in the human society can be protected and his freedom can be ensured only by acting on those principles.

1. The fact is that this policy began to be acted upon during the time of Uthman himself. During the time of the Prophet and the period of the caliphate of Abu Bakr and Umar everything belonged to the Muslims and they were treated to have equal rights. However, Uthman's attitude changed considerably. He considered everything to be the property of God and considered himself to be the master of the Muslims. He spent public property as he wished and gave it to whomever he liked. The Commander of the Faithful has drawn a picture of this period in these words: "Consequently the third proudly took charge of the caliphate as if it was a private grazing ground and with bloated stomachs he and members of his clan (Bani Umayya) started plundering the wealth of the Muslim world in the same reckless gluttonous manner which characterises a camel when it devours harvest grass.

Uthman deprived the lawful claimants of that property which belonged to all the Muslims and gave it to his kith and kin and near and dear ones. On many occasions he uttered words which reflected the beliefs of the age of ignorance according to which the lands and its produce and the public treasury belonged to the ruler and he was entitled to give it to whomsoever he liked. This sentence of his is found in all history books: "This is God's property. I shall give it to whomsoever I like and shall not give it to any one whom I do not like to give. If any person gets annoyed I don't care".

Mu'awiya and other Umayyad caliphs were the relatives and kinsmen of Uthman. Whatever they did during their own times was done by them in imitation of Uthman.

2. This goes to show that if the peasants are allowed to share the produce with the land-owners they will work hard to earn more profit from the land. However, if their position is that of wage- earners (as in socialism) they will not strive to increase the produce, knowing that they will get the same wages whatever the quantity of the produce may be.

Further, the socialist governments are a heavy burden on their subjects. They interfere with all the affairs of the subjects and the subjects, too are not faithful to such government, because they do not have any faith in them.

- <u>3.</u> The western philosophers are divided into two groups on this question. One group considers forced labour to be unjust and unlawful whereas the other group considers it to be necessary. Socialism holds the latter view.
- 4. In the beginning of his letter addressed to the governor the Commander of the Faithful had told him that he should encourage the people to dig the canal and bear the expenses of the work. He who could not personally work, should hire someone to work on his behalf. Being `owners of the canal' means that those who participate in its digging physically or financially own its water and so long as their needs are not fulfilled others cannot utilize it. They have a right to prevent others from taking the water or to allow them to take it on payment. This is the purport of the tradition quoted above viz. "The owners of the canal are those persons who participate in digging it and not those who refrain from doing so".
- <u>5.</u> In the Islamic law zakat has been made mandatory for this very reason. Abdullah bin Sanan has been quoted in Kafi as saying that Imam Ja`far Sadiq said: "God has fixed that share of the indigent persons in the wealth of rich which may suffice them. If He had considered it to be insufficient He would have ordered that more might be paid".
- 6. Meeting the needs of the indigent and helpless person is not the responsibility of the government only as stated by the author. In Islamic law the government as well as the individuals have been made responsible to support the needy. If the collection of zakat and its distribution among the poor had been the responsibility of the government only, there would have been greater chances of maladministration, because the persons nearer to government have benefited to the exclusion of those who had been at a distance from the government, and had no chances of approaching the authorities concerned. It is for this reason that Almighty God has ordered the individuals that they should pay zakat to their kinsmen, neighbours, and the indigent persons of their own town of whose indigence they are aware, and should hand it over to government only when none of their relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, and residents of their town is entitled to it.

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