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HAZRAT ALI –MAN OF KNOWLEDGE AND VISION

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Islam brought about a great revolution in the field of knowledge in Arabia where literacy was almost unknown and people took pride in their ancestry rather in culture and civilization. According to Tabari, the great historian and commentator on Qur'an, there were no more than 17 people in pre-Islamic Mecca who could read and write. No wonder than that pre-Islamic period came to be called period of jahiliyya i.e. period of ignorance. It was in this background that Qur'an's emphasis on knowledge has to be seen. The very first verse begins with the word *iqra'* (read) and the word *'ilm* (knowledge) occurs more than 800 times in Qur'an as against the word *jihad* which occurs no more than 41 times. Qur'an called *'ilm* light and *jahiliyya* darkness.

One can say there were three principle sources of knowledge in Arabia of the: time Qur'an, the Prophet (PBUH) and Ali. The Qur'an was of course the principal source which came through *wahi* (revelation) to the Prophet, Prophet's contribution was through hadith (what he said on various subjects) and sunna i.e. what he did and people observed and reported. Ali's contribution has reached us through his speeches as he was man of great oration and which was later collected under the title *Nahj al-Balaghah* i.e. (Highway of Oration) and some letters he wrote to his governors. There is famous hadith of the Holy Prophet accepted unanimously "I am city of knowledge and Ali is its door" and one enters the city through door. Such was the importance of Ali in the matter of knowledge. Ali contributed very richly to intellectual advancement of Muslims.

Qur'an is source of revelatory knowledge i.e. from Allah and Prophet's knowledge was innate rather than acquired and Ali's knowledge was what the Prophet passed on to him and hence called *'ilm ladunni* as well as what was born of his vision of the society. Prophet was *insane-e-kamil* i.e. perfect human being and Ali next to him in perfection. Hence for sufis Muhammad and Ali were two sources of inspiration. The Prophet (PBUH) lived in this world and yet was never attached to it. Ali, who always tried to closely follow the Prophet, never felt attracted towards the allurements of the world. He is even reported to have said I divorce the world thrice i.e. never to be attracted by it.

Ali, like the Prophet, was basically a deeply spiritual person and yet, like the Prophet, was conscious of the fact that millions of people live in this world and this world should be such as to provide meaning and guidance to human life and to minimize human suffering. Renunciation of the world is no solution. This is possible only if one fulfills bodily needs but does not become slave of one's body.

There was power struggle in early Islam but Ali kept away from it unless power was thrust on him after the assassination of third Caliph Hazrat Usman. Ali, while avoiding temptation of power was also conscious of the fact that one needs power, not to control others but to enforce certain rule of law, morality and justice. Qur'an provided best guidance and yet all

those who embraced Islam did not become perfect Muslims. They had all sorts of worldly temptations and many of them even had embraced Islam for worldly gains.

Ali's priority, therefore, was to mould Muslims into real mu'min (i.e. believers) and make them good Muslims and this world a just place to live in, in keeping with the Qur'anic teachings. Qur'an tried to strike balance between spiritual and bodily needs, between materialism and spiritualism, the Prophet being its perfect blend. Ali's exhortations in *Nahj al-Balaghah* are a rich source of this approach. Since Ali never sought power to control others and exercise his authority, when it was thrust on him he used it to enforce rule of law and justice as rigorously as he could. In this process even his closest allies were alienated from him but he did not care. Abdullah bin Abbas was his closest ally and yet he wrote a stern letter to him when he took money from state treasury as a governor of Basra which was more than his share. He left Basra unhappy.

Ali's letter to another of his faithful ally Malik bin Ashter, governor of Basra which is considered as masterpiece of principles of governance. He advised Malik "do not say, 'I am your overlord and dictator, and that you should, therefore, bow to my commands", as that will corrupt your heart. He further writes to him, "Let your mind respect through your actions the rights of God and the rights of human beings...for otherwise you will be doing injustice to yourself and injustice to humanity."

He also advises Malik Ashter to "Care for them with tenderness with which you care for your children, and do not talk before them of any good you might have done to them, nor disregard any expression of affection which they show in return..."

Chief Justice should be selected, he writes, from the best of people who cannot be intimidated, who does not err too often, one who does not turn back from the right path, one who is not self-centred or avaricious.

Thus it would be seen Ali's concept of power was for people. Never over people but unfortunately the world was not perfect enough to accept this concept and he paid price for it through his life and became martyr for the cause on 21st of month of Ramadan.