

The concept of man in Nahj al-Balagha

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Abstract:

The Nahj al-Balagha (Way of Eloquence) is the most famous collection of sermons, letters, interpretation and narrations attributed to Ali, fourth caliph of Sunni Muslims, cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad. It was collected by Sharif Razi, a Shia scholar in the tenth century. Known for its eloquent content and it is considered a masterpiece of literature in Shia Islam. Islam gave very precise and clear perspective concepts about man. Islam clarified to man his reality, his origin and the different stages of creation that he goes through. Nahj al-Balagha took peak point of love and affection by depicting the creation of man. Then the man in the Nahj is one who has thoroughly knowledge about what happen around him, not one who foreshorten to himself.

Key words: Concept of Man, Intelligence, Nahj al Balagha, Shia Islam

Introduction

Islamic scholar Muhammed Abda¹ comment on Nahj al-Balagha²; “Certainly, eloquence has independency, fluency has purity, phantasm has ferocity and suspicion has faithless, as I am listening to orator of foresight who invite with noble words and possess the society, he made know the site of righteous,

enlighten the places of suspicion, admonish them with the lubricator of excitement and lead them to accurate policy.”

The Nahj al-Balagha is the most famous sermons, letters, tafsir, and narration attributed to Ali Bin Abi Thwalib. It was collected by a Shia scholar known as Shareef Razi³. Nahj al-balagha is well known for its eloquent content. It is considered as a masterpiece of Islamic literature. Literary it means peak or way of eloquence⁴. It comprises wide variety of topics ranging from the creation of the world, the creation of first man and end of the universe. From these topics we can refer to the concept of man like we cite same from the Qur'an and other major resources of Islamic principles.

Man in the View of Islam

Human existence has been the concern of philosophers, poet and religious thinkers. It continues as relevant topic in all streams as long as human being exists. Ever since man existed on this earth he has been trying to know himself. Man get confused in all cases, sometimes he thinks that he is the greatest in this universe, so he gets filled with selfishness, oppressiveness and arrogance that would drive him to disbelieve in The God, the Almighty⁵. In the other hand, he think that he is the most belittled, the weakest and the most worthless being in this universe, so he bow his head with submission before creature of creator⁶. Because of this confusion Islam gave very precise and clear perspective concepts about man.

Islam clarified to man his reality, his origin and the different stages of creation that he goes through. The same concepts are narrated in Nahjul al-Balagha also. When the basic doctrines of Islam draw us the clear picture of his good attributes and his receptiveness to good and evil and his purpose in this life and the relationship between him and the rest of creatures around him, Nahj al-Balagha describe us these

concepts fascinating and embody to our mind as the part of our sense.

If the basic source of Islam, like Qur'an, depict the precise concept of man, Nahj al-Balagha characterize broad concept of man as it enter to one's mind deeply, that is why Muhammed Abdu introduce it as collection of "orator of foresight"⁷. We should consider this point of view, independency of eloquence in all aspect of theme of Nahj al-Balagha, whenever take this collection into account of research.

Some quoting from Holy Qur'an revealing the concept of man in Islam, we can see same conception in Nahj al-Balagha in different narration. Qur'an refers the word 'Al Insaan'⁸ in 56 places. By which one can cite reality of man. Qur'an says,

'The God wish to lighten your burden for man was created weak (in resolution)⁹ 'when trouble touches the man, he cries unto Us'¹⁰. Man was created weak and he usually needy for help from The God. The God says: 'If we give man a taste of mercy from ourselves, and then withdraw it from him'¹¹. So, The God is the ultimate power who tastes his slave mercy and revenge. And the man is subjected to The God for all his things.

The God says: 'We created man from sounding clay, from mud moulded into shape'¹². 'For man is given to haste', 'but man is, in most things, contentious'¹³. In the view of Islam, man should be intellect because argument is the product of active intelligence.

Man in Nahj Al-Balagha

'Man whom The God has created in dark womb and layers of curtains from what was over flowing semen, then shapeless clot, then embryo, then suckling infant, then child and fully grown up young man'¹⁴. Ali bin Abi Thwalib go with us to the long period of time, when he was nothing to mention¹⁵. The conception of man envisages from the womb aim to active relation of parents as it is a fortune to get to serve aged mother or father and moreover it is his duty as a human being. Nahj al-

Balagha took us to this peak point of love and affection by depicting the creation of man.

In the views of Nahj, God gave him heart with memory, tongue to talk, and eye to see with, in order that he may take lesson from whatever is around him and understand it and follow the admonition and abstain from evil¹⁶. Then the man in the Nahj is one who has thoroughly knowledge about what happen around him, not one who foreshorten to himself. Islam provide him opportunities to think, not to blind himself, and the same way Nahj also encourage the man to think and build up the concept of man in the frame work of intellectual. Now the modern sense of man rises question how such a religion can restrict the intellectual discourse of its believer? Nahj al-Balagha prevent such allegation against Islam through same doctrines by placing Islam as religion of reason while it put some condition that such thoughts which follow the evil and bring closer it instead of 'abstain from evil'¹⁷.

When he attained the normal growth and his structure gained average development he fell in self-conceit and got perplexed. Here Nahj reach the concept of Qur'an pertaining incites of human soul to evil¹⁸. So one's life should be submitted to his lord, The God the almighty. Nahj never see the birth of man as a byproduct of sexual life of parents as modern concepts of man's birth sees, but it is the result of surrender of something for the sake of something more valuable. She accepted him to her womb deliberately, not accidental. That is why every mentioning to man's creation connected to mother's womb as to remember the compliance to mother.

Man who independent from all restrictions, even from moral, social and universally accepted ethics, is not derived from Islamic conception of man. This modern view makes challenge to Islam while Islam opposes it successfully through its literature like Nahj al-Balagha. Nahj introduce such a man who restricted naturally as God wish and he was confined himself according to thought of life after here and circumstances were provided him naturally. For instance, over

exploitation of natural resources is banned universally, nor religiously, but as common understanding, now the man in the concept of Nahj al-Balagha doesn't go with this maximum utilization theory due to order from his God. So Ali bin Abi Thwalib remembers his fellows about Day of Judgment on the sermon delivered in connection with the purpose of life.

The man who holds energetic thoughts which would cause to disagreement between them and might be they were in variation and in different way in the social and the political issues. Nahj approaches this difference based upon such a concept of man that is natural and simple side of humanism. We can see that all his speech and writings keep honor of opposition as he maintain the understanding of man which agree that the opposition also such a man having his own thoughts and visions. If we go through his letters related with political issues¹⁹, we will realize this concept from the same.

Man is responsible for his activities while The God gave him freedom to choice in several things. So he emphasizes the importance of selection in social and political issues. Verily, The God, who above time and place, know everything about His creature. So we should believe in predestination. The Islamic man thus remains aware of the eschatological realities of the fact, that although he lives on this earth, he is here as traveler far away from his original abode.

Islam makes clear for man that he does not deserve worthlessness and humiliation, so he becomes equal to the other creatures like animal and others. The God says: 'we have honored the children of Adam and carried them on the earth and in the sea and provided them the good sustenance, and we made them better than many of what we created'²⁰ then The God clarified that He made the whole universe in the service of man. He says in another place: "Do you not see that The God made available for you what is in the skies and on earth flooded you with many blessings known and unknown."²¹ All this is to incite man control what is around him from other creatures, without having to humiliate himself to anything and without

fear. This way, pride and honor are built within man, and his feeling of being grateful to The God, the great is created²².

Ali bin Abi Thwalib says as threatening who forget their purpose of coming to this world as The God says that all are created to worship Him²³: The great calamity of that place is the hot water and entry into hell, flames of eternal fire and intensity of blazes. There is no resting period, no gap for ease, no power to intervene, no death to bring about solace and no sleep to make him forget pain. He rather lies under several kinds of deaths and moment to moment punishment. We seek refuge with The God. O' creatures of The God! Where are, those who were allowed (long) are ages to live and they enjoyed bounty. They were taught and they learnt; they were given time and they passed it in vain. They were kept healthy and they forgot (their duty). They were allowed long period of life, where handsomely provided, were warned of grievous punishment and were promised big rewards. You should avoid sins that lead to destruction and vices that attract wrath of The God.

Conclusion

Ali bin Abi Thwalib present concept of man in the light of Qur'an and connecting with the same to his own intellectual interpretation in Nahj al-Balagha attractively. Firstly, his abilities to express the Islamic principles in different and fascinating way, and we can see its magical effect throughout the book Nahj al-Balagha. Secondly his quoting from Holy Qur'an along with his own charming style in narration and portraying broad concept of man which touches all the minute part of one's life and the sermons remaining without any question due to its deep and clear depiction of different topics. Thirdly, although he describe the concept of man in his own way it never oppose the teachings of Holy Qur'an but accept more strength for his words from Qur'an and other Islamic teachings.

REFERENCES

- ¹ : Muhammed Abda: one of the forerunners of Islamic renaissance movement in Egypt. He studied at Al Azhar University. He played his role in many movements as a writer and motivational factor like Urabi movement. He died on 1317H
- ² : Nahj al Balagha is a collection of 241 sermons, 79 letters, and 489 utterances by Imam Ali
- ³ : Shareef Razi (969 -1015). His great work known as Nahj al-Balagha by which he became famous in literary history. He was one of the noted poets of Abbasid period. He has two volumes of Arabic poetry. He died on Baghdad on 1015AD
- ⁴ : Nahj- way or peak, Al Balagha- eloquence. The English version of Nahj al-Balagha, named as peak of eloquence
- ⁵ : Holy Qur'an 41:15. "Now the A'd behaved arrogantly through the land against truth and reason and said: who is superior to us in strength?"
- ⁶ : Holy Qur'an 4:28
- ⁷ : Mohammed Abda, introduction to Nahj al-Balagha (Arabic version), Maktaba Misr, Egypt
- ⁸ : it mean Man
- ⁹ : Holy Qur'an 4:28, the undoubted fact is mentioned here in format of question in Aya of Qur'an to get assent of man
- ¹⁰ : Ibid 10:12
- ¹¹ : Ibid 11:9
- ¹² : Ibid 15:26
- ¹³ : Ibid 18:54
- ¹⁴ : P: 484 , sermon no: 82, Nahj Al-Balagha (English version). This sermon is called the al- Gharra , it is one of the most wonderful sermon of Amirul Mumneen, this sermon include remembrance about death and resurrection , the limitation of life, reminding people of Allah,s bounties, preparation for the day of judgment, warning against satan and creation of man
- ¹⁵ : Holy Qur'an 76:11
- ¹⁶ : P: 484 , sermon no: 82
- ¹⁷ : Ibid
- ¹⁸ : P:485, sermon no: 82
- ¹⁹ : Letters from Amirul Mumineen like letter to the people of kufa before proceeding the battle of jamal, letter to the people kufa after conquest of basra and letter to the Qadhi of Kufa , Shurayh. ..etc.
- ²⁰ : Holy Qur'an 17:70
- ²¹ : Ibid 31:20
- ²² : Imam Mohammed Bayanae, Islamic centre of Raliegh,1997
- ²³ : Holy Qur'an 51:56