



The Mutual Rights and Duties of the Public and the Sovereignty in the Teachings of Nahj Al-balagha

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ABSTRACT

Mutual duties and rights between people and sovereignty is one of the strategic and significant issues in the contemporary world. In the Islamic teachings especially Nahjulbalagha it is not that the right is allocated to the ruler and government and on the other hand people only have duties and responsibilities. Rather the ruler has the significant duties even if he would be innocent. Among the strategic tasks of the ruler and leader are: Benevolence, Fair distribution of wealth and management of education system. These duties are, at the same time, the rights of the people and the ruler. On the other hand, people have duties in front of the Islamic ruler. In other words, these duties are rights of Religious Governance including loyalty to sovereignty, Support and response to demands of authority and etc. It is worthy to mention, the main aim of these rights and duties has been devised to provide the felicitous life for people in the world and hereafter.

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1. Introduction

One of the important issues in the history of different societies has been the rights and duties of the governments and people. Undoubtedly, individuals cannot be considered separated from society and its complex processes. Rather, social and political changes have tangible effects on the personal manners of an individual. In fact, he needs a comprehensive strategic lifestyle rather than a limited one, and if he wants to have a comprehensive outlook, he should also pay attention to sociological issues. That is to say, in this lifestyle, both the rights and duties of an individual as well as her political and social rights and duties should be taken into account. As it was said, the religious and divine rulings regarding the socio-political sphere of life might even be more important than the rulings about the personal-individual domain. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of Nahj al-Balagha, the biggest divine right is in the socio-political domain of life, as Imam Ali (a.s.) says, "The greatest of these rights that Allah, the Glorified, has made obligatory is the right of the ruler over the ruled and the right of the ruled over the ruler. This is an obligation which Allah, the Glorified, has placed on each other. He has made it the basis of their (mutual) affection, and an honor for their religion" (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 216). However, the question is that what are the instances of these rights and duties from the viewpoint of Nahj al-Balagha teachings? The article at hand aims at addressing the clear instances of these rights and duties based on the content of sermon 34 of Nahj al-Balagha. Definitely, in order to fulfill these rights, the government agents and

people should know and put into practice their rights and duties. It is noteworthy that when rights are discussed, the duties are also included in the discussion. In fact, the other side of the rights coin is duty and responsibility. As stated by Nahj al-Balagha, no one is endowed a right unless he is given a duty, i.e. he has a responsibility. Conversely, no one is given a duty (i.e. has a responsibility) unless she has a right over another person. (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 216)

2. People's rights and the responsibly of a religious sovereignty

It should not be conceived that in a religious government, it is only the ruler who has rights and that people have only duties. Nonetheless, such a state could be formerly seen in the West, when the dictatorships and suppressions were at their summit and people were desperately wanted to hear that the right to rule the country actually belongs to them, this idea was put constantly forth that regarding sovereignty, people have only duties and responsibilities, not right. (Morteza Motahhari, 1997, p.134). However, in the Islamic sovereignty, the ruler is held responsible and has important duties even if he is an Infallible¹.

According to sermon 34 of Nahj al-Balagha, the rights that Imam Ali (a.s.) enumerates for people (that in turn become the duties of the ruler) are as following.

1. Counseling people: Nasihat (Arabic word for council) basically means "purity". Arabs call the pure honey "Naasih". Therefore, Nasihat is attributed to any kind of pure benevolence toward another person, one which is free from deceits. Consequently, Imam asserts that one of the rights of people over their ruler is his pure advice and benevolence toward them. An instance of Nasihat is the sincere and compassionate sympathy of the ruler with the people. For example, in letter 45, he writes, "It is not possible for me to satiate myself when there are around me people whom hunger and thirst keeps restless and agonized ... Shall I be satisfied simply because people call me "Amir al-Mu'minin" (Leader of the faithful Muslims)? Shall I not sympathize with the faithful Muslims in their calamities? Shall I not be their partner in their adversities? Shall I not be their fellow-sufferer? Shall I not set an example for them to patiently, courageously and virtuously bear privation?" (Nahj al-Balagha Letter 45). As 'Allameh Ja'fari puts it, it is with this sublime feeling that a ruler can have the same benevolence toward the people of his society as he has for himself. Such a ruler considers tyranny toward people as tyranny toward himself. (Ja'fari, 1997, p. 26). In fact, the real agent of the Islamic government is one who is disturbed by the existence of the hungry in the society, not one who sets collection of assets and pleasure-seeking as his priority.
2. To pay you your dues fully: "Fi" (Arabic equivalent of Fi) in Imam Ali's words refers to all assets of the public treasury. "To pay your dues" denotes that the ruler should give the public assets fully to the needy and the owners of the rights, and improve the economic and welfare of the people. (Ibid., p. 346). Of course, with regard to the literal meaning of the word "Tufir" (i.e. pay the due), some of the commentators have taken the phrase "to pay your dues" as increasing the spoils and public treasury of the country. This means that the ruler should increase the national assets and riches as a prerequisite to improve the welfare of the people and their prosperity. (Mudarrres Vahid, Anonymous, p. 262)
3. To teach you that you may not remain ignorant: another duty upon the religious sovereignty is establishment of a right education and training system for people. In other words, state and government's involvement in the right education and training domain is not only their duty but is also people's right. If the government falls short in this regard, people should ask for it. This makes more sense when we consider the fact that the governments have vast media facilities to be used in increasing the knowledge of the society and in enlightening it. If the right knowledge flow is not

¹ Imam Ali says in sermon 216 of Nahj al-Balagha that the only entity in the existence that has only right but has no duty is God, although as a sign of his generosity He has determined a duty for Himself.

transferred to people, the society might make mistakes in its calculations and fall in the traps of doubts and distortions, just like the disasters that afflicted the people of the Levant during Muawiyah time. Imam Ali (a.s.) asserts that one of the tricks of Muawiyah to grab power and distort the people of the Levant was to censor the news and distort the public opinion about the right and the rightful people. Imam says that as a result of this, people exposed themselves to the disturbance arrows and were finally taken to destruction and annihilation. (Nahj al-Balagha ,Sermon 51), Imam tells people that it is their right to have the government responsible for the right education of the society. The duty of the religious ruler is to fight against ignorance and lack of knowledge through the right and healthy education and to eradicate the main reason of mischiefs – ignorance and obliviousness – via promotion of the culture and perceptions of the society.(Makarem shirazi,2007 p. 347).

4. To instruct you in behaviors that you may act upon: besides education, moral training of the society is another mission of the sovereignty. If a government is Islamic or religious but does not pay attention to the enhancement and evolution of the culture and moralities of the people, it is certainly betraying religion and people and has not fulfilled its responsibility. If the Islamic government does not undertake the moral training and does not preserve the moral health of the society, the system of the Devil and its agents will embark on the corrupting and distorting the society and will fill the moral gap in this way. With the sentence "To instruct you in behaviors that you may act upon", Imam deems the religious government and sovereignty responsible to work in order to enhance the theoretical and practical wisdom of the society. In fact, "education" regards the knowledge and theoretical aspect, while "moral training" concerns the practical and moral dimension of the human and society. Therefore, the Islamic government may not be reprimanded because of its involvement in the scientific and cultural aspects. Rather, in Nahj al-Balagha viewpoint, this is the duty of the government and the right of the people.

3. The rights of the religious sovereignty and the duties of people

On the other hand, the second part of the religious teachings regards the rights that the government and the ruler have upon people. In fact, these are the responsibilities and duties that people should fulfill for the Islamic government. These rights have been categorized into four groups.

1. Fulfillment of allegiance: the first right of Imam over people is their fulfillment of allegiance with him. This is one of the most important things and is related to the general organization of the society. Allegiance is in fact the same agreement that is held between the nation and Imam, a strong and binding agreement. According to this agreement, people should back their Imam and leader and under no circumstances stop supporting him. Moreover, no party or group has the right to break its promise through reneging and rowdiness to endanger the national security. It should be noted that pledge of allegiance to the righteous Imam and leader is in a way pledging allegiance to God. The Holy Qur'an introduces people's allegiance to the honorable Prophet of Islam as pledging allegiance to God, "Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to God...", and since in Shia school of Islam, Imam is extension of prophethood, then this pledge of allegiance to Imam is in a way pledging allegiance to God. (Ja'fari, 1997,p.38)
2. Well-wishing in presence or in absence: the meaning of Nasihat was presented earlier. As Imam and leader should be sincerely benevolent to people, they should also sincerely accompany and help the sovereignty. Ibn Maitham Bahrani has taken "Nasihat of Imam Ali in his presence and absence" to mean that people should defend him in his presence and absence and should not allow anyone to slander or destroy the character of their leader. If opponents have a point, they can express it in Imam's presence so that he can answer it.(Ibn Meytham, 1996, p. 179).But it should be said that this is only an instance and representation of Nasihat, while this word has a vast scope and definition and includes any type of benevolence and linguistic and practical cooperation. 'Allameh Ja'fari has a specific and pleasant interpretation in this regard. He writes, "Through a precise assessment of the

results of the competent leaders' management during history and in the light of knowing the human aspects of the leaders and by having the necessary and sufficient knowledge of the authoritative Islamic resources, we can liken the competent leader of a society to the keen reason and conscience of that society. Just as an individual can only supply her rational and "logical life" through sincere and benevolent treatment of her reason and conscience, a human society can have a rational and "logical life" when it shows a sincere and benevolent treatment toward its leader as its reason and conscience. (Ja'fari, 1997,p.41)

3. Response when I call you: the third right of Imam is that people should respond him firmly and quickly. When he calls them for Jihad, they should get mobilized, otherwise, the enemy will conquer them and they will lose a lot in the aftermath. This historical reality should be noted that when someone is not awakened by the shouts of his leader and does not hurry to help him, he will get awakened by the hits of his enemy and of course he will be dishonored!
4. Obedience when I order you: the fourth right of Imam over people is their obedience of his commands. It is clear that social affairs will not be organized unless the commands of the leader are observed. Imam Ali (a.s.) considers obedience of and compliance to the commands of Imam the way to organize and consolidate the society. He says, "God has set obedience of us the Lineage of the Prophet as the cause for social organization in the Muslim nation and our leadership as the factor underlying the safety from disunions."(Tabarsi, 1982, p. 258).In fact, from Imam Ali's viewpoint, guardianship and Imamat are the organizing factors of Islam and Muslims if the nation accepts the guardianship and follows the commands of the present guardian. Moreover, guardianship and Imamat comprise the only axis of unity, security, and justice.

4. Conclusion

Before renaissance, the common belief was that rights just belong to the governments and their orders and requests are the same as the divine commands. In addition, people were just believed to have the duty of obedience. After the renaissance, on the contrary, the idea of separating religion from politics got dominant and the authority of the church in political and social affairs diminished. But in the Islamic teachings, especially those of Nahj al-Balagha, both governments and people have rights and duties, provided that the government executes the divine orders and commands, not its own incorrect readings and interpretations of religion. If the latter occurs, the duty of people is to observe the divine orders not the incorrect readings and interpretations about religion. It is only through this that people can embrace the true bliss.

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