God, Human being, and Universe

(A Viewpoint of Nahjul Balagha)

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Abstract:

Almighty Allah has revealed His guidance to His last Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W.W.) in the form of Quran. It is regarded as the fundamental source of knowledge for a Muslim. The other important source is the sayings of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.) which have been preserved in the form of Hadith. Hazrat Ali (A.S.) was the real cousin, closest associate, and a preacher of Holly Prophet’s mission. The wisdom thought of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) is available in the form of a dignified and a complete book under the title Nahjul Balagha. Admittedly after Quran and Hadith of Holy prophet (S.A.W.W.) this collection of Sermons, letters, and sayings of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) have been regarded as the most dependable source of Islamic Philosophy, by the scholars and thinkers; both Muslims as well as non-Muslims. In this article we have tried to discover the relationship among God, Human being and Universe in the perspective of Nahjul Balagha.

Keywords: God, Human being, Universe, Phenomenon of Creation, Human conduct and behavior

Introduction

Islam occupies a unique and distinguished status in the history of religions. The instructions of a religion and its genesis could only be ascertained by focusing attention on its founder and preacher as well as on the conduct and character of his close associates and followers. Almighty Allah has revealed His guidance to His last Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W.W.) in the form of Quran. It is regarded as the fundamental source of knowledge for a Muslim. The other
important source is the sayings of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.) which have been preserved in the form of Hadith. Hazrat Ali (A.S.) was the real cousin, closest associate, and a preacher of Holly Prophet’s mission. The wisdom thought of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) is available in the form of a dignified and a complete book under the title Nahjul Balagha. Admittedly after Quran and Hadith of Holy prophet (S.A.W.W.) this collection of Sermons, letters, and sayings of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) have been regarded as the most dependable source of Islamic Philosophy, by the scholars and thinkers; both Muslims as well as non-Muslims.

In Nahjul Balagha the spiritual glimpses of Quran as well as Hadith are frequently evident. It is interesting to note that from the close associates of Holy prophet (S.A.W.W.) there is none except Hazrat Ali (A.S.) Whose philosophical and religious approach is available in the form of a book.

Almost all the religions, schools of thought and even the intellectual movements claim that they stand for the betterment and perfections of Humanity. The strength of their claim depends upon the co-relationship specified therein among God, Human being, and Universe. Its authenticity is further examined by the principles under lining this inter action.

For conducting our research in this perspective we have taken Nahjul Balagha as our basic source and reference and we have therefore proposed the title of this article as under “God, Human being, and Universe (A Viewpoint of Nahjul Balagha)”.
Some Socio-Philosophical Aspects of Nahjul Balagha

Under this title we will try to trace out the historical, socio-philosophical and political perspectives in which Hazrat Ali (A.S.) had delivered his sermons, which had been subsequently collected in the form of Nahjul Balagha. This was the period immediately after the passing away of Holy prophet (S.A.W.W.). Nahjul Balagha therefore, mostly contains the issues and matters of that age. And with it there are many valuable teachings concerning the methodology and philosophy of human conduct, which are as valuable and practicable in our age as were useful in that age. We can conveniently divide this book under these topics:

1. The socio-political conditions of that age

2. Fundamentals of Faith i.e. Tauhid (Oneness of Allah), Prophecy of Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W.W.), Quran (Last and final revelation of God to His Last Prophet (S.A.W.W.), Resurrection, The Day of Judgment, and Life Hereafter etc.

3. Branches of Faith

4. Purpose of Creation

5. Object of Religion

6. Characteristics of a Leadership

7. Necessary Conditions for an Ideal State

8. Political System of Islam

9. The exposition of the Mysteries of Universe

10. The Universal realities of human life as well as the principles under lined by the religion for human conduct

11. Development of an Ideal Being

12. Welfare of Humankind etc.
These subjects have not been arranged in Nahjul Balagha in identical chapters. We can, however, deduce from the sermons, letters, and sayings as they throw light on above heads. We observe that Nahjul Balagha depicts peculiar socio-political and other cultural conditions of early Islamic Society, as well as the fundamental rules of life.

Hazrat Ali (A.S.) was a man of high caliber, dignity and perfection. His life covers all aspects of individual and social struggle. In His times society was filled with terrible contradictions and conflagrations. As a consequence of subjugation of other states, the Muslim Society had been culminated into a rich and a wealth state. This had depressed the ethical values. Society had been oriented toward collections of wealth and other degenerating norms. This was a critical juncture in the history of Islam. At this stage the political control of society was entrusted to Hazrat Ali (A.S.). He effectively dealt with the divergent tendencies. For the amelioration of the society, He delivered lectures and commands at various occasions. A close study of His teachings brings us at home with the methods and teachings for the correction of a degenerating society. He had amicable spelled out the means for the restoration of ethical values and suppression of desires for accumulation for wealth, status and other positions. He described the qualities of the inner self of an individual as well as the secrets of success for socio-political struggle. Even today, in the 21st century, the various human societies are torn out with the desire of wealth and other material ambitions. Welfare, morality and ethics have been mercilessly neglected. A conscientious person can feel that the trends of these societies could be corrected by an application of the rules taught by Hazrat Ali (A.S.) in that age.

However we revert to our discussion for examining the relationship of God, Human being and Universe. In this sphere Nahjul Balagha is rich with the valuable knowledge and advice. Hazrat Ali (A.S.) had laid down profound emphasis on the experimental and consequential conditions. He had spelled out the nature of this supreme relationship as well as duties of an individual and that of a society. He had revealed some mystical entities of the custodian of universe. This is the main theme of sermons of Nahjul Balagha and we will deduce the philosophical approach relevant to our discussions.
Nahjul Balagha and the Concept of God

Although all topics are interlinked with each other but it is impossible to discuss about all subjects who have been mentioned above. So we precede our discussion under some specific heads.

Under this head we would restrict our discussion toward comprehension of unity of God. Concept of God has always been a theme fascinating the attention of thinkers. The old Greek and Latin thinkers undertook the unity of God as: First Cause, The Mover, or as Constructor of universe. (Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2000) Whereas some others altogether attempted at proving Atheism, even some Muslim thinkers have taken a great effect from these Latin, and Greek scholars and Philosophers. In this regard Mutazalites and Asharites and subsequently, Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn-Sina and Ibn Rushad and Ibn-al Arabi are known for their works on philosophical and mystical toward unity of God. Similarly, under the influence of various approaches of mysticism, doctrines like pantheism and panen-theism emerged in the Muslim thought. After critically examining these ideologies we can safely acclaim that Hazrat Ali’s concept of God is absolutely coherent with the concept of God as introduced by Islam. It is based upon Quran and Hadith. We feel that God has a direct relationship with human beings. It has been well expounded in the very first Sermon of Nahjul Balagha which follows as under

“He is with everything but not in physical nearness. He is different from everything but not in physical separation. He acts but without connotation of movements and instructions”. (Ali, Peak Of Eloquence, 2004)

Hazrat Ali (A.S.) undertakes the conviction that this relationship between God and Human being finds its bases on deep spiritual entities of a human life. He understands God as an immortal being who is undoubtedly in command of the whole universe without having a partner. He has sublime authority and enjoys all powers of virtue and goodness. (Ali, Peak Of Eloquence, 2004) Again in sermon no.19, Hazrat Ali (A.S.) has said:

“Praise to be Allah, Who has displayed such effects of His authority and the glory of His sublimity through the wonders of His might that they astonish the pupils of the eyes and prevent the minds from appreciating the reality of His attributes” (Ali, Peak Of Eloquence, 2004)
We find that in Nahjul Balagha the concept of God has been introduced in a unique and identical style which has no other example. He has laid down that the complete personality and perspective of human life has been devised in accordance with the will of God.

Again the fundamental objective of human creation is to ensure the maintenance of a human beings relationship with its creator as it has been taught in Sermon No.180.

“Praise to be Allah to Whom is the return of all creation and the end of all matters”. (Ali, Nahjul Balagha, 2004)

**Concept of an Authentic Being in Nahjul Balagha**

Among all, human being is a unique creature with both spiritual and material tendencies and potentials. Prominent thinkers of every age discussed about human being and presented their views in this regard. In this age there are four great intellectual approaches in this regard i.e. Western Liberalism, Marxism, Existentialism, Religion. There is a lot of difference, contradiction, contrast and incoherency between them. (Shariati, 1987) Religion is an all-time phenomenon while other three intellectual trends are the product of modern age, started after renaissance. These doctrines have been put forward by various schools of thought in different periods.

A comparative study of all these conceptual doctrines leads us towards the conclusion that the emphasis of each (directly or indirectly) is upon the concept of an authentic being, or superman. The underline theme of above said topic is to trace out the qualitative characteristics of this exemplary and perfect or an authentic human being in the perspective of Nahjul Balagha. This had been persistently taught by Hazrat Ali (A.S.) in different sermons, letters, speeches, and sayings. He vehemently prescribed that high dignity, preservation and un-impeachable morality are the necessary characteristic for this authentic being. He is always submissive before the will of God but enjoys richness with his power of contentment but against falsehood cruelty suppression he stands past symbolizing the ethics of courage and boldness. He always remains in surmountable and stiff against inhuman forces. We have deduce this from Sermon No.84, volume No.1
Hazrat Ali (A.S.) further has explained the characteristics of this authentic being. According to him the human being tending towards perfection never accepts dualism between truth and falsehood. He only seeks the approbation of God almighty and device his conduct accordingly. As it has been expounded in sermon No.238

“Allah seeks you to thank Him and assigns to you His affairs. He has allowed you time in the limited field (of life) so that you may vie with each other in seeking the reward (of paradise)”. (Ali, Peak Of Eloquence, 2004)

**Universe as Envisaged in Nahjul Balagha**

Universe has always been a topic of deep interest for the Philosophers and Thinkers: the ancient as well as modern thinkers have come forward in this realm of knowledge and have confidently put forward their explorations. Some of them take it as a phenomenon which has come into existence by itself. Some others describe that it has been created by the fundamental elements i.e. fire, air, water and soil. ([www.iep.utm.edu/empedoc](http://www.iep.utm.edu/empedoc)) Pythagoras regards it as the out-come of mathematical figure, ([plato.stanford.edu/entries/pythagora](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pythagora)) the Atomism take it from Atom, (W.T.Stace, 2000:88) and the Empedocles describes it as the product of four basic elements. Plato knows for his Theory of Ideas in which he has dealt with the complex problem of the creation of universe. ([www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/464109/Plato](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/464109/Plato))

Similarly in the modern age from Descartes to Hegel, all the Rationalist as well as Empiricist has paid attention towards this philosophical proposition.While according to Bing Bang theory about 13.7 billion years ago the process of development of this universe had been started due to a huge explosion. ([ssscott.tripod.com/BigBang.html](http://ssscott.tripod.com/BigBang.html))

After having a close study of all these ideologies we embark on our theme and pin point our attention on Nahjul Balagha. It is interesting to study that how Nahjul Balagha has described about universe and its creation? We try to elaborate and to have an educative appreciation of this concept.

In Sermon No.209, Hazrat Ali (A.S.) has dealt with the question of universe at length and He has magnificently thrown light on this question of supreme interest. He has lucid and persuasive
manner which stands irrefutable. He had claimed that universe has been created from the water which has been regarded as the basic element.

“It is through the strength of Allah’s greatness and his delicate power of innovation that He made solid dry earth out of the water of fathomless, compact and dashing ocean. Then he made from it layers and separated them into seven skies after remaining joined together.” (Ali, Peak Of Eloquence, 2004)

There are number of verses in Quran which reveals to phenomenon of creation from water specifically verse number thirty of chapter number twenty one is a clear evident of this fact. (Quran, 21:30)

These conceptual reconstructions had also been described in the Bible. In the Bible this had been held that universe has been created from water. (Bible, 1916:1) Subsequently the Greek philosopher Thales also endorsed this view. (Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2000:883)

In Nahjul Balagha, Hazrat Ali (A.S.) had described the concept of universe with the assistance from a verse of the Holy Quran. In Sermon No.89 he had said.

“Whatever He has created is an argument in His favor and a guide towards Him. Even a silent thing is a guide towards Him as though it speaks, and its guidance towards the creator is clear” (Ali, Peak Of Eloquence, 2004)

**The Relationship among God, Human being and Universe**

Now we will trace out the relationship among Creator, Human being and universe as narrated in Nahjul Balagha. It is a philosophical as well as doctrinal discussion. We dig deep into realities governing the stages of this inter-relationship all in the light of teachings of Nahjul Balagha. We also observe the distinctive feature in this concept of inter-relationship in Nahjul Balagha with that of other philosophies.

In Nahjul Balagha we observe the essence of the teachings of Quran and Hadith (S.A.W.W). According to Quran, God is One, Absolute Creator, and nothing is like Him. (Quran, 42:11). All the process of creation is purposeful. (Quran, 44:38) He is Almighty and Omniscient. (Quran,
35:15). East and West are for Him. One would find him in every direction. (Quran, 2:115). Every-thing has come from Him and will return to Him. (Quran, 2:156).

Usually we observe these approaches in respect of the conduct and behavior of a being in this world.

- Death is the ultimate end of life. All pleasures and sorrows belong to this world. So one should struggle to achieve every-thing in this world, either by right way or by hooks and crooks.
- This world is temporal. Every-thing is mortal. There is a life hereafter. That life and world is eternal. This world is unsacred, impure, polluted, and filthy. So, one should avoid himself from all matters of life and affairs of this world.

Islam presents a comprehensive plan for human beings. There are two types of verses in Quran.

a) Verses which narrate the mortality, temporarily, and instability of this life and world.

b) Verses which expound the suitable role of a being in this universe and elaborate the nature of relationship of a being with God and universe. (Mutah'ri, 1992:271)

According to Quran, nothing is unsacred within a being or within universe. Allah is Absolute creator and He has created and designed every-thing on good. Islam has developed a balance between both the worlds, i.e. material world and the world hereafter. (Mutah'ri, 1997:98)

Hazrat Ali (A.S.) in Nahjul Balagha expounded the Quranic point of view. For Him,

- There is no opposition in both the worlds
- The life of this world is neither ultimate end and nor a prison while it is a beginning of another life.
- The success of life hereafter depends upon a purposeful life in this world
- To achieve this goal one must live a life according to Divine parameters
- Momentary pleasures of this life are not ultimate end but struggle in this world for a higher cause is obligatory
- One should must play his role in this world according to will of God to get the will of God
Hazrat Ali (A.S.) in Nahjul Balagha has illustrated this relationship in the light of Quran and Hadith (S.A.W.W.) in these words:

“You will find three types of people in a society. Those who exert and strive to be good and to do good, there salvation is curtained. Those who are lazy and lethargic-tardy strugglers, inactively and ineffectively hoping for the best, and lastly those who are defaulters and failures in duty, shall end in hell. Remember that extremes off right and left will lead you astray, moderation is the best course for you to adopt it will keep you within the four corners of the teachings of the Holy Quran and the tradition of our Prophet (S.A.W.W.). It is a path which will guide you to the true impressions of the doctrines and life of the Prophet (S.A.W.W.). It will lead you to the fountain-head of Sunnah (tradition) and along it is the correct route to liberation. Whoever claims to know a better path to salvation than the one disclosed by the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.) is doomed, who frames and invents lies against its true principles is condemned, and one who tries to oppose its percepts is destined to eternal destruction.” (Ali, Peak Of Eloquence, 2004)

The practical and practicable life of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.) is an ideal link between, Divine and material, revelation and reason, eternal and corporeal. So to understand the relationship between God, Human being, and Universe, we should follow the ideal life of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.).

**Effects of Nahjul Balagha on Socio-Philosophical Outlook of the Muslim World**

Now we try to describe the effects which have been carried out by the wisdom teachings and philosophical concepts of Nahjul Balagha throughout the Muslim History. In fact these conceptual cum practical perspectives have affected the socio-philosophical as well as socio-political outlook of entire Muslim World throughout the history. No doubt, it is a valuable topic for another research. In further studies for finding the above mentioned facts we will have to pin point our research on these aspects:

A. How the people have taken Nahjul Balagha and its Philosophical teachings on the individual and the social life
B. Secondly, How they have followed the wisdom approach of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) in their practical life and what trend it has given to their ethical, cultural and social life.

Conclusion

At this stage we culminate the emergent course of our research. We may sum up in our concluding remarks that how deeply and persistently Hazrat Ali (A.S.) has flung himself for meditation on these fundamental issues concerning human life and that with what honestly and stiff endeavor he had signified these valuable instructions for the betterment of human beings. Throughout the ages these concepts have played a pivotal and determining role in dimensioning the social and cultural perspectives of Muslims as well as all human civilizations.
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