

IMAM HUSSAIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO HUMANITY

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Human life is a serious matter having a purpose and a goal. Such purpose and goal is other than keeping oneself firm to perform certain duties in the daily pursuits. The provision of life's requirements pertaining to nourishment of the human body and its safety is, of course, essential for human existence and cannot be ignored, yet it is restricted to the flesh and bones of an individual. The gamut of human life includes, besides the body and mind of the individual, the challenges in the social, economic, political and cultural fields, and scores of other ancillary problems faced by the human beings in the collective fields. The even more formidable challenges that have to be overcome by man in order to make progress are those of the environment, the atmosphere and the outerspace that are thrown at him by Nature. Thus all the needs of the body and mind have to be catered not in isolation but through coordinated efforts so that the human beings are enabled to face these challenges successfully. All the Prophets, sages and great men in human history have, in one way or the other, contributed to the provision of these human requirements.

Imam Hussain (may he be exalted) contributed profoundly to the development of human consciousness and intellect, and to the strengthening of the human will to offer sacrifices for great causes, by rendering the supreme sacrifice during his political struggle against Yazid – the usurper, the despot, the tyrant. The cause that Imam Hussain upheld steadfastly was that of the basic freedoms and rights of the human being from which stem all the benefits of human beings.

The picture generally painted about the martyrdom of Imam Hussain is that of a dignitary belonging to the family of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), having fought a war of succession against an opponent of the family for seizure of power and gave away his life in the process. He has also been monopolized by a

particular sect as its Imam, debarring the rest of the Muslim community from accepting and acclaiming him as their great leader, and from paying a befitting homage to him. Certainly, left to himself, he would never have created a sect of his own within Islam. Hence his contribution to the development of human thought cannot be restricted. Narration of the woeful tale of the Karbala tragedy too is generally considered as the end and all of the entire episode. No tangible lesson is drawn from the encounter between the usurpers of rulership and suppressors of human rights as against the upholders of democratic rights of the people that are being ruled. The fact of the matter, however, is that Imam Hussain created history in the political and constitutional domain by establishing with his blood, the principle that the right to rule essentially rests with those inhabiting a country, and can be entrusted only to the representatives of the people elected through a truly democratic process. This right cannot be acquired by an individual by way of inheritance or by force of arms. The example set forth by Imam Hussain prevents people from entering into compromises with a monarchical or a dictatorial governmental setup. It, on the other hand, ordains that such political arrangements be scrapped altogether and replaced by a democratic order. This lesson is addressed to the whole of humanity and is not restricted to the Muslims or to a certain sect alone.

There are other lessons too that emanate from the example of martyrdom set by the Imam, and call for urgent attention of the people living in the twentieth century (and the following centuries) all over the world. As we all know, the most important issue facing the smaller nations of the world, particularly those belonging to the Third World, is that of the hegemony of the imperialist powers over them. Through their clandestine influence they help impose upon the people of the smaller nations such personal rulership as would, on the one hand, keep their own masses illiterate and devoid of political awakening and, on the other hand, allow the imperialist powers to tailor their countries' economies according to the requirements of their own vested interests.

Thus, by keeping their people suppressed and ignorant of their role in life the monarchs and the dictators embark upon feeding their own narrow personal interests as well as those of their foreign masters. The initial and the most crucial casualty occurring in such an

arrangement is that of individual freedom, which is the *sine qua non* for human existence. This freedom needs to be fully safeguarded if the faculties inherent in the human race are to be developed fully and the human civilization advanced in the right direction. Imam Hussain, in fact, stood up to defend this right. The message he really left for posterity is that all human beings are born equal in status and rights; that an individual has equal authority over another except by way of better qualities of head and heart developed by himself, and that authority has to be exercised with the willful and explicit consent of the other; that if any of their rights is trampled upon, every effort should be made to get it redressed; that all human beings, individually as well as collectively, are subservient to Nature and its laws which they should discover and follow truthfully. Once the people constituting a nation understand this message rightly, they can neither be ruled by despots from among themselves nor come under the hegemony of foreign imperialist powers.

Another lesson to be learnt from the Imam's example is that the illegitimate rulers, who impose themselves upon the people by other than a democratic process, invariably resort to the illusory religious cliché that they possess God's blessings, as did the treacherous Yazid. Having committed the heinous crime of cold-blooded murder of Imam Hussain and his companions, and having humiliated and tortured the women of his household, Yazid and his henchmen produced the shameful argument that "the Almighty Allah had disgraced the Imam and his companions, killed them and revealed the false nature of their claim". History goes to prove that religion has always been used by the despots as a tool for prolonging their oppressive rule over the people. The professional religious elite have invariably sided with the despots and have always stood in the way of establishing a just order by preventing the people from uniting for the establishment of a progressive democratic government.

Finally, I would mention the splendid example set by Imam Hussain's sister Syeda Zainab which is worth emulation by the women. The story of Imam Hussain's martyrdom would not have reached the latter generations with such clarity and animation had not Syeda Zainab (the grand daughter of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), daughter of Hazrat Ali and sister of Imam Hussain) played her role so successfully by exposing before the Arab people

the nasty political game of Yazid and his coterie, and preserving the real lessons of the Karbala for the coming generation of mankind. She took the courage, while in captivity, to address aloud from the camel's back the people who had thronged the streets and bazaars of Kufa and Damascus. She made them aware of the actual facts about the conspiracy hatched against Imam Hussain who had stood up to defend the doctrine of Islam, that had bestowed upon humanity irrevocable freedoms and rights. She also vividly exposed the evil designs of Yazid to usurp the " people's power of self-rulership". It was on account of her exhortations before the masses that they were enraged and finally encouraged to rise up against Yazid and destroy his regime. Syedna Zainab, though a women, was able to change the course of events by her courage, superior intellect and strength of conviction. This fact of history goes to prove beyond doubt that women are inherently capable of doing whatever men can do and, in certain conditions, achieving even more than men.

It accrues, from all that has been said above, that the people of any country should remain vigilant and on their guard for defending their basic freedoms and rights, because from these alone flow the development of the faculties of an individual as well as the progress of a nation. The social and political institutions of a country thrive as a sequel to these, leading in turn to a flourishing culture. To achieve such an advance in human relationship a coordinated effort by the young, both male and female, is required. This can only be done if the leaders of public opinion, the intellectuals, the youth, the students and the workers come together to build a sizeable cadre of social and political activists with a view to handing over to them, in the near future, the delicate responsibility of building their nation with the help of sound and secure political institutions and converting their country into a haven of peace and plenty by putting in persistent efforts and by offering substantial sacrifices in this process. Come, let us vow on this day of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain to take upon ourselves this felicitous responsibility.

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