

Governance Model Of Imam Ali (A): A Quick Glance

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How Imam Ali (A) Ruled?

Here are few details reflecting the historic analysis of how Imam Ali (a) ruled over the Islamic world and brought an unimaginable change in the Islamic society.

1. Agricultural Development

Land is the source of “life”. From the viewpoint of Imam Ali (a) people who possess land and water and are at the same time poverty–stricken, will be far from Divine Mercy and deprived of Allah’s favor. Imam emphasized on reviving the land and recommended the development of farming as a means of eliminating poverty from the community, and called people to engendering prosperity in the lands and exploiting them. Above all, he regarded attention to agriculture as a touchstone for evaluating the governments and their efficiency in ruler–ship, viewing agricultural development as among the main duties of administrators, and troop commanders as defenders of farmers’ rights.

The other most important is related to craftsman.

2. Development Of Crafts

The community in which Ali (a) had set up his hukuma did not have the qualifications for “development of crafts”, due to its climatic conditions. However, his holiness – according to the traditions quoted from him placed great importance on crafts, calling them in general as “treasures”. Imam Ali (a) enjoined his administrators to seriously support the artisans and encouraged the latter to employ utmost producing well–made goods, and never to sacrifice a product’s “craftsmanship and quality” for the “speed” in production.

3. Development Of Trade

In the early Islam as well as during Imam Ali (a)’s hukuma, trade was the most influential activity in people’s life. Thus, on one hand he would encourage trade prosperity and on the other, would stress on supporting the merchants within governmental structure; and finally, he would explain how to practice trade, how the merchants were to deal in transactions, and in what manner trading had to be performed.

4. Direct Supervision Of The Market

The market presents economic endeavors of a community. Transactions take place in the marketplace, and the marketeers are somehow associated with people. Well-being of the market would lead to well-being in transactions and people's sound exploitation of the process of economic struggles for sustenance. Doubtlessly, the prime loss due to abnormality in improper relations in market transactions would be sustained by the people.

Due to the importance of the market and its great impact on people's economic situation and livelihood, Imam Ali (a) directly supervised the market and the quality of transactions there. His holiness would go to the markets of Kufa every morning and, and use to instruct in a God-fearing manner — avoidance of selling short weight, lying, treachery and tyranny to the marketeers.

The texts reporting this direct supervision are very interesting and instructive to read. The Imam would raise a call among the Muslims enjoining them not to practice frauds and hoarding, to be fair and honest in offering goods as they really are, not to pretend genuineness, to treat the customers in a well-disposed manner, not to devalue the seller when they are buying goods, and not to overestimate their own goods when selling them.

All these admonitions, warnings, and instructions of the Imam given to the marketers are worth mentioning in practice of fairness, justice, human disposition, dignity, and magnanimity.

5. Fair Levy Of Taxes

Government, in Imam Ali (a)'s view, is for the people and for the establishment of their rights. That is why a part of the government's financial needs must be met by people who benefit from the government and engage in producing and trading under its protection. It is with such intention that taxes are levied in all ruling systems, although by different methods of collection and inclusiveness in different systems. In 'Alawi politics, stressing on levying taxes and government's responsibility in inclusiveness of receiving them from people, as well as the kind of viewing taxes and the reason for and the quality of levying them from people are worth paying attention. Trust in people, emphasis on not creating problems for people, drawing people's attention to the status and the importance of taxes are also noteworthy.

In an instruction to one of his administrators, Imam Ali (a) states, "Never use whippings in collecting taxes nor put people under pressure for that". And the administrator says, "In that case I will have to return the same way I have gone; that is, the people will not give anything." The Imam replies, "Even if that happens [i.e., even if they give nothing.]"

A glance at 'Alawi doctrines in this respect shows that the tax organization and its agents are bound to win people's trust and to observe Islamic morality and religious behavior, while being alert and take care of safeguarding public treasure and carefully learn about the problems of taxation.

6. Not Delaying In Distribution Of Public Assets

Imam Ali (a) did not approve of blocking public assets in the state's treasury. Rather, he would try to deliver them to the needy. The Imam's sira indicates that he would not tolerate even one night of delay in this regard. He contended that what belonged to people had to be delivered to them the soonest possible.

7. Necessity of People's Equal Enjoyment of Public Assets

Equal distribution of the public assets among all Muslims was one of the policies in Imam Ali (a)'s hukuma. This was contradictory to what had been done to people in the previous years. Therefore, it cost very dear to the well-to-do and those benefiting from the government, and the so called "large grains" (i.e., the bigwigs).

In the Imam's outlook, the Muslim's skin color, tribes and ancestors, their social and clan relations did not make any difference in their portion in public assets. Arabs and non-Arabs, the Emigrants (muhajirun) and the Helpers (ansar), the black and the white, and even the freed slaves and their former masters, were equally treated in this respect and all enjoyed equally from the public incomes.

8. Provision Of Basic Needs Of Life For All People

The general trend of Ali (a)'s economic policy is to struggle with poverty and uprooting it from the face of Islamic community. His holiness' guidelines in this respect are very thought-provoking. He insists that hunger and indigence of a group is caused by unlimited exploitation by another group and open-handedness of the well-to-do:

Whenever a destitute person remains hungry, it is because some rich person has denied (him his share).

The Islamic state is bound to prevent the undue accumulation of riches in the hands of the opulent, to eradicate the means of exploitative benefiting of the rich, and to assist with constant attempts and accurate planning the inferiors to meet their basic needs for living. He did lead Kufa, even in that short period of his rule and despite so much clashes, intrigues, and hindrances, to a condition that he proclaimed:

Then in Kufa, all people were enjoying ease and comfort, and the most inferior of them had bread and shelter from the sunshine and enjoyed water from the Euphrates.

Imam (a)'s recommendations to his administrators for paying attention to the lower classes of society and the so-called "low-income stratum", are amazing. He does not tolerate the indigence of a Christian who once had been exploited by the opulent and at his old age had been abandoned, and commands

securing his needs through public treasury. He also commands his governors to search all corners of society to identify the poor and the needy and to disentangle them from the claws of poverty.

9. Prohibition Of Bestowing Gifts Out Of Public Assets

Governors are people's trustees and what they have at their disposal is kept with them in trust.

Government administrators are not allowed to give away gifts from the government's assets on various occasions and pretexts. Ali (a) views such treatment of public treasury as tyrannical:

The administrators' open-handedness in public assets is tyranny and treachery.

10. Never Granting Privileges To One's Kith And Kin

We said that in Imam Ali (a)'s view what is at the disposal of the governors and administrators is trusted to them, being allowed to use the assets at their disposals just in administering and rendering services.

They do not have the privilege to allocate certain provisions to specific groups. The sons and close relatives of political and social dignitaries in Ali (a)'s hukuma as well as his own sons and relatives did not enjoy any particular privileges. Above all, the Imam showed more sensitivity towards his friends and kin, and was harder and stricter on them in using the public assets in order to set an example for others.

11. Frugality In Public Assets

Given what was said, Imam's policy in consumption of public assets, how the administrators should use them, and how the public treasury should be spent is very interesting and instructive. In order to draw the administrators' attention to utmost frugality in [spending] public incomes and preventing them from extravagance, the Imam asked them through circulars to practice frugality even in writing letters to him:

Sharpen your pens and reduce the space between lines; eliminate the redundant for [writing to] me, and hold on to the meaning and beware of verbosity in writing, for the Muslim public treasury does not tolerate loss.

Evidently, when an administrator hears about so much carefulness in writing letters, he would no longer give lavish banquets, or ride costly horses, or try to achieve more and more welfare for himself through public assets.

The Imam's personal frugality in spending the public treasury is very amazing, too. He would not even use the lantern belonging to the public treasury in order to respond to those people who came to him at night time for personal purposes. Also in this line is the thought-provoking and instructive story of Talha and Zubayr who went to Ali (a) to discuss their personal problems while he was seeing into public treasury affairs and then he turned off the public light and had another lantern brought in, unwilling to use the light from a lantern belonging to the public treasury for personal purposes even for a few moments.

From the above points you could easily understand the situation which was created by Imam Ali (a) in his hukuma.

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