

Discourse Analysis of *Nahjul Balagha* (Peak of Eloquence) Statements: Reacting to Some Social Issues

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Abstract

Discourse analysis of Nahjul Balagha statements provides useful information for resolving some social problems we have encountered or may encounter in present world. In this paper, we are going to perceive some features of holy Ali's discourse about a better world by evaluating the content of Nahjul Balagha which is a book of Imam Ali's comments and policies. In the same vein, we have juxtaposed it with other philosophical thoughts which have been proposed through history of governments. Since the content of Nahjul Balagha has gone much further than its time and its spiritual instructions are one of the best and most comprehensive examples of a divine theology, we can use it to investigate the competency of governments. Some of the challenging viewpoints in contemporary era, including anarchism, capitalism, sound economy and other related issues are evaluated in this passage on the basis of Nahjul Balagha perspective. The picture of a complete human is presented in Nahjul Balagha and this is why it has significant implications for governments. Since government and its theology is presented in an eloquent way by Imam Ali (peace be upon him), examining this everlasting book can be a clear route for governments in contemporary era just like the spiritual instructions of Confucius which has guided Chinese people—and is continuing to affect them—for a long time.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Social Issues, Nahjul Balagha, Imam Ali, Confucius.

1- Introduction

Undoubtedly, human negligence and absence of pondering will be two main reasons if we want to find the cause of nescience. Human beings always need a light to develop their minds and to be immune from seduction; this light helps individuals to distinguish right and wrong and leads humans to the liberty. One of the most brilliant gems in this field is Nahjul Balagha which exceeds its time and introduces the highest level of humanity to the world. This book has addressed some of the needs of modern societies and this modernity saved Ali's comments from being outdated. Nahjul Balagha is a book of all generations with an everlasting shining and truthfulness. One of the unnoticeable outcomes of negligence is getting used to the negligence process itself. As it is mentioned by Freire (1970), this negligence and acceptance of life under the influence of autocracy may lead to an ordinary trend for the oppressed. Certainly, the human beings consistently need a source to warn them of this unnoticeable negligence. Nahjul Balagha is similar to a precious counsel in the humanities' hands that depicts the visage of a perfect human and a meritorious society in all of its chapters which depict the sketch of four seasons as a beautiful painting.

Value of the holy Ali's thoughts becomes evident when we find a coincidence between his spiritual instructions and philosophical theories of some notables like Confucius who lived in China circa B.C. 500. As an instance, Confucius' theories about social morality and features of a governor are considerably similar to the holy Ali's thoughts. There is a famous saying by Confucius which reads: "What you do not wish for yourself, do not impose on others" (Huang, 1997, p. 125). The same concept is vividly pointed out in Nahjul Balagha: "O my son, set your soul as a measure between yourself and others, so what you wish for yourself, ask for others as well, and what you do not wish for yourself, do not impose on others" (Dashty, 2005, p. 375). Confucius' theories have penetrated social relations as well as governmental duties. In the same vein, the holy Ali's commands are considered valuable in many aspects too. We are going to discuss Confucius and his thoughts further some where else in this study.

Sound governing, which is based on a true love in God and results in enhancement of humane values, and the role of people in swearing allegiance to it are repeatedly discussed in Nahjul Balagha. It means that expanding humane values is impossible except for a humane condition in a sound governing. In an instable government with an instable governor, citizens never follow the rules, and moral values may be replaced by devilish temptations. Confucius always put emphasis on humanity in his morals: “If you yourself are correct, even without the issuing of orders, things will get done; if you yourself are incorrect, although orders are issued, they will not be obeyed” (Huang, 1997, p. 134). Similar concepts can be found in the holy Ali’s instructions which we are going to deal with further in the study. Therefore, it is deduced that Nahjul Balagha comments are not made only for the Shiite, and they were respected in B.C. 500. In the other words, it proves the cosmopolitan features of Nahjul Balagha rules which represent the salvation and blessedness for ready hearts.

Since people need a just leader to suppress the cruelty of the cruel and support the oppressed in any period, the existence of a government, generally, and a competent government, specifically, is a significant point. This equality in the sharing of power is referred to in Nahjul Balagha: “Do equally your glance and your stare at people; so the strong won’t become greedy by your cruelty and the weak won’t be disappointed of your justice,” (Dashty, p. 363). In the holy Ali’s point of view, humane governing which is based on divine comments is a way to save the God’s servant from seduction. This opinion is supported in Nahjul Balagha by this statement: “Indeed the God specified and chose you for Islam, because Islam is derived from the origin of health and prepares the health for the society” (ibid, p. 199). It can be deduced from this statement and many similar others that true divine comments, which “Qur’an” has been its beating heart for ever, can be in charge of basic needs in modern societies, and its amazement is endless—many people refresh themselves and tolerate calamities by adhering to an endless power, God.

2. Discussion

2.1. Government and Governor in Nahjul Balagha

Keywords such as government and governor are special topics in Nahjul Balagha. About 30 letters out of total 79 letters point out to these subjects, and most of the other letters from Ali to Moavia are allocated to awareness and reminding. Imam Ali expressed the necessity of Imams’ existence after the prophets as: “The holy prophet Muhammad chose a successor among you as all previous prophets did for their nations; because they never left people wandering and never went away unless they introduce a vivid route and a stable sign for the people” (Dashty, p. 25). Certainly, human beings confront new issues and need different responses in different epochs. Nahjul Balagha instructions can be a proper guidance in this meandering road in the middle of such fact-findings, because it ignored no minor problem. The value of governing would be clearer when we know some great philosophers like Confucius who spent most of their life on educating efficient manpower in order to be used in governing system. Confucius believed in this fact that if the government is reformed, the people will be righteous even without any order or rule. Confucius paid much attention to bring the justice into being from the beginning of his service in the imperial court. He also considered this point in his instructions. One of the most important points for recruiting people in the governing system was their intellectuality and competence (Huang, 1997). Most of the Confucius’ instructions revolve around the axes of piety, benevolence, honesty and respect. His concentration on governmental reforms was because of his belief in this point that a dishonest governing leads to nowhere. Undoubtedly, dishonesty and injustice in governors’ behavior lead to destruction.

This point should be mentioned that entering in governmental system was an important subject in B.C. 500; therefore, the volunteers had to study gnosticism and theosophy beforehand. Who can claim that there is no need for a government in the modern societies in which deviation and divergence are widely available? Holy Ali mentioned the Kuffa’s backwardness as: “Your lands are repeatedly invaded and you do not care” (Dashty, p. 34). Do not they need an intellectual leader to bring such people to the senses? Undoubtedly, Ali’s school of thought which is nourished by the divine light, mentions some points like justice, amity, theism, honesty, solidarity and many other issues that can educate a spiritual leader. Nahjul Balagha has kept all of its activeness and comprehensiveness even after several centuries. It is expressed in Nahjul Balagha about the existence of governments:

You should know that a person who understands a future conspiracy will step in it with an illustrative light and follow the method and manner of the prophet and imams in order to solve the problems and emancipate the captive nations and slaves (ibid, p. 195).

Such foresightedness refers to the future problem of the human beings and their need for an illustrative light to overcome the problems and conspiracies. Nahjul Balagha has expressed its activeness and comprehensiveness which can be used in responding to some of modern problems. The following are just few examples.

2.2. Anarchism and Nahjul Balagha

Anarchism is defined by Alem (2005) as follow: “In the anarchists’ idea, anarchy means lack of the existence of any government or sovereignty, and anarchism means supporting this idea and refusing all types of powers and authorities on people” (p. 88). Khavarej refused a democratic government at the time of Ali. They believed that governing belongs only to God. Ali answered their comment as follow: “This is a right word, but they intend something wrong by that” (Dashty, p. 479). Nahjul Balagha rejects this thought which is supported by statesmen in some modern unrestrained societies and answers it as:

Indeed the God chose a leader prophet with a fluent book and a stable rule. Wrongdoers will be perished. You should know that novelties acquire the same color as rights and are perishing unless the God keeps us safe from them (ibid, p. 229).

It can be deduced from this sentence that governments are responsible for the prevalence of perishing novelties as a realm of divine rules; and executing divine rules is impossible unless in an conscientious government. Holy Ali mentioned that neither victory nor defeat happens due to the number of the warriors, but this is the religion of the God that leads to the victory of human. It is stated in the 16th lecture of Nahjul Balagha, in 4th chapter which is named *The vagabondage of people and necessity of piety*, that:

Some people move toward right quickly, they are saved; some of them move slowly, they are hopeful; and some others neglect, they will be captured in fire of the hell. Left and right ways lead to nowhere and the straight way lead to divinity (translation of 41st lecture).

Nahjul Balagha expresses that human beings need a guide in all epochs to warn them of wrongdoing. Since this straight road has lots of detours, an intellectual leader is needed to keep people far from such detours. When Khavarej claimed that governing belongs only to God, Nahjul Balagha expressed the following factors about the necessity of government (the translation of 40th lecture):

- Collecting the governmental treasury
- Fighting against the enemy
- Defending the rights of the poor
- Supporting the goodness and fighting against the violence

It seems that the people who support anarchism look at government as an obstacle against their benefits and take the most advantage of unruliness. As it is mentioned by Freire (1970), some people always feel at danger when others know about the realities because their benefits depend on others’ ignorance. If ordinary people find an opportunity to get rid of their ignorance under the influence of a government, there will be no place for the cruel and cruelty. Certainly, the imagination of anarchism makes the distance between the cruel and the oppressed several times further. Therefore, the oppressed do not have any other choice except for accepting the cruelty and look at it as a natural phenomenon. It is what the cruel people and wrongdoers are looking for. The kind of government expressed in Nahjul Balagha always dissuades people from negligence. Nahjul Balagha, with its inspiring diction, is a brilliant spring in order to aware the human being. The existence of a cognizant and competent government plays an important role in reviving the *tradition* of the prophet, divine comments, and some other gracious people who sacrificed their lives to save humanity and divine route. To notify neglectful people, some missionaries are needed to remind such self-sacrifices to the people constantly.

2.3. Capitalism and Nahjul Balagha

Capitalism has been a serious debate during the two recent centuries and has remarkably developed (Pryor, 2010). Capitalism is an economic system. It means private ownership of wealth production (ibid). Although many people believe in this point that free economy is a powerful device that leads to a free politics, some researchers and knowledgeable people disagree. For example, Friedman (1962) believe in this point that though free economy leads to a free politics, it will be destroyed by the same free politics after the formidability of that political system. They were few examples of new issues in modern societies. Different theories worsened the situation and made the problem more complicated.

Nahjul Balagha disapproves capitalism and has a clear position against it: “Corrupted capitalists are dogmatic to possess the blessings in different nation” (Dashty, p. 279). In the translation of the 45th letter in Nahjul Balagha, it is said to the governor of Basra: “O, Ibn-Hanif! I was informed that one of the capitalists in Basra has invited you to a ceremony; I did not think that you accept the invitation of the people whose servants are deprived by cruelty” (ibid, p. 393). One of the capitalism problems is its harm for all people in the society. This is a big defect for a governor who can not look after this problem. According to holy Ali’s belief, capitalism can be prevented via different methods as: the transaction should be simply done on the basis of justice and according to safe prices, either for the seller or the buyer. The holy Ali believes in this fact that the starvation of the starved is due to capitalists’ treatment of the world:

Indeed the generous God puts the daily bread of the poor in the properties of the capitalist. Therefore no poor remains poor unless due to the fulfillment of the wealthy, and the God will ask them about the poverty of the poor (ibid, p. 505).

Eivazi (2009, p. 15) stated that most of the economic processes in the next two decades are capable of creating a social gap and humane dissatisfaction, including the increasing gap between the poor and the rich, or the difference of living style in a city or a village. It is said to the tax agents who worked for the governor of Isfahan, Mokhnaf ibn Salim, in Nahjul Balagha: “There is a specific right and determined share for you in these gathered taxes; you have some partners, the poor and the weak” (Dashty, p. 363). Nahjul Balagha pays lots of attention to the poor people in the society and advocates that objecting to social gap has been one of the most important rights of all governors.

As Moradkhani and Emami (2009) have explained, according to Marx’s opinion, the government plays a superficial role as a special producing method, and then he connected it to different social levels. This issue which is denied in Nahjul Balagha is referred to as that personal utilization of governmental facilities. In a letter to Ardeshir, Imam Ali said: “I am informed that you have granted the war booties, which are obtained by the Muslims’ swords and horses and by their bleedings, to your relatives who have chosen you!” (Dashty, p. 393). He said in another letter to one of the governors: “Even if those things, which you have taken unjustly, were religiously permissible to me, I never set them as a heritage for my people” (ibid, p. 391). Utilizing governmental facilities are rigidly disapproved by the holy Ali’s speeches and letters uncompromisingly. It is said to aware one of the holy Ali’s companions that (ibid, p. 335): “These properties, that you see, are neither mine nor yours. They are some war booties which are obtained by the Muslims’ swords and belong to them.” Those people who played no role in the preparation of facilities can not have any share in their ownership. Properties are classified in 4 different parts in Nahjul Balagha and each of them has its own position: 1) the Muslim’s properties; 2) the war booties; 3) Islamic tithe; and 4) Charities (ibid, p. 497). In Nahjul Balagha, it is mentioned that the governors and those people in authority are not allowed to use their position for personal goals and the government is like safekeeping in their hand.

2.4. Sound Economy

Expanding the justice in economy and preventing hypocrisy in transactions have been advocated by Nahjul Balagha. According to holy Ali’s opinion, these two features are among the most important ones in a competent government. Imam Ali has expressed in 32nd lecture that: “What a bad business that you buy the life in this world at the cost of your soul, and exchange it with what belongs to God... steps are taken short and hypocritically...” (Dashty, p. 57). Moreover, it has been mentioned that “do charity without any kind of hypocrisy and pretension” (ibid, p. 47). Hypocrisy has been rigidly disapproved in Nahjul Balagha: “Even a tinge of hypocrisy or pretension is polytheism” (ibid, p. 103). Nahjul Balagha, with its indefinite depth, is a book for a perfect person as well as a competent government. Justice is the second feature in moving toward a sound economy. A short glance at Nahjul Balagha clears this fact that *justice* is the most useful word in holy Ali’s comments. Imam Ali said in one of his lectures about determining the political economy that: “In justice, there is a trend toward the public” (ibid, p. 39). This is one of the main features of sound economic which means “mutual gain and miss”, a just system. Holy Ali expressed in the rest of the last lecture: “A person who can not stand the justice, should know that standing the cruelty is harder than it” (ibid, p. 39). Utilizing the power for the sake of abusing the economic sources is disapproved in Nahjul Balagha as well. This is the foundation of a sound economy which leads to a sound society.

2.5. The Principles of Peace and Amity

One of the other entangling issues among Nahjul Balagha comments is *schism*.

Topics such as peace and amity have been discussed and endorsed in Nahjul Balagha. In the translation of 69th letter to governors, holy Ali has mentioned that: “Control your temper, forgive at authority, be humble at anger, and act moderately at governing...” (Dashty, p. 435). Holy Ali always prohibited his followers from personal usage and mentioned that such misuse damages other people or causes dangerous hardship: “Keep away from a work which satisfies you and dissatisfies the others” (ibid, p. 435). Somewhere else Ali mentions in his comments: “Revenge should not be your best solution in the world” (ibid, p. 433). Peacefulness of Ali’s policies can be understood clearly in another letter in Nahjul Balagha: “I send an army to you and have commended them not to bother you and I have recommended my army to avoid violence, as God has commended amity to all the people” (ibid, p. 425).

Undoubtedly, immoral people did their best to exterminate the solidarity of the good spirits in individuals. They treat cruelly against them. They have mentioned that the prophet Muhammad’s’ religion is the religion of violence. Violence is the exact opposite point of solidarity. They define Ali’s comments and religion as a violent ideology due to their lack of knowledge about the history. Holy Ali has clarified the events in Seffin war as:

We told them let’s cease the fire, calm down the warriors and solve the problem via negotiation in order to set the solidarity among the Muslims; but they, the Syrian, answered, ‘there is no solution, except for war’. And the war began (Dashty, p. 425).

A question may come to mind that what is the reason of such accusations and denigrations or why the immoral people try to distort the history? Holy Ali answered this question, addressing to Moavia, in Nahjul Balagha: “You and Syrian people told that lie and accused me; you wanted to provoke uninformed oppressed people against me” (ibid, p. 423). Bloodshed, rapacity, violence, irascibility, haughtiness, precipitation and lots of other characteristics which disturb the peace of people and governments are disapproved in Nahjul Balagha. Most of those accusations against divine comments and Godly religions are happened due to lack of sound knowledge and conscience.

3- People and Government

Tajik and Darvishi (2004) argued that the governments are made according to the people desires and spirits. Certainly the quality and knowledge of people in governments play an important role in enacting the divine rules. Holy Ali did his best to introduce the picture of a prosperous person in Nahjul Balagha to establish a competent government. The role of people is undeniable in the government. Even in big revolutions, people played the main role to replace the absolutism by solidarity. Oppressed people steer their society instead of the cruel. According to Ali’s opinion, oppressed people should not be ignored. He always paid lots of attention to them. Imam Ali wrote to Malik Ashtar in a letter: “Think about their [the poor] problems constantly and do not ignore them, especially pay attention to those little needs of them which are not usually considered” (Dashty, p. 415). Four factors are mentioned in the translation of 25th lecture by Imam Ali about the reasons of a nation defeats:

- 1- Lack of solidarity
- 2- Disobedience to leader
- 3- Betrayal to leader instead of belief in him
- 4- Corruption and sabotage instead of reform and prosperity

The aforementioned points define the role of people in a competent government. Most of the holy Ali’s speeches are about awaking people as well as educating governors for a peaceful life. This is visible in all of his lectures and letters in Nahjul Balagha. He has remonstratively defined the Muslims after the prophet as follow (the translation of 32nd lecture):

1. A group of them does not go astray because they can not. (It means they won’t be ashamed of doing depravation if they can).
2. Another group who subverts vividly and corrupt the religion.
3. One other group that does charities hypocritically and they have dishonest intentions behind their works.
4. Some of them wore the cloths of the pious with abjectness.
5. A small group of them who worships the God in their loneliness.

The concordance of Ali’s speeches and Quran instructions are clear now. In chapter *Al-Shuara*, 190th verse of Quran it is mentioned that: “Verily in this perdition is indeed a sign, yet most of them are not believers.” The above point has an important hidden meaning in it.

It means that humanity will confront lots of problems after the prophet Muhammad and sound governors should be bound to their safekeeping of Muhammad's comments. Inviting people to theism has been one of the concerns of the government according to Ali's definition. A competent government never survives except by the existence of informed and knowledgeable people, and people never are redeemed except by the existence of a Godly government.

4. Conclusion

Nahjul Balagha is a book whose instructions about future can be vividly understood and these instructions are not limited to specific time or place. Eivazi (2009) mentions that "one of the goals of studying future events is comprehending and correct understanding of newly-born issues and methods of confrontation with them" (p. 4). Some discussed issues in Nahjul Balagha can lead people in all epochs—and in all aspects of life. According to Said's (1994) opinion, some orientalists look at Islam as an unchangeable religion. This point of view represents their lack of knowledge. Going to extremes, precipitation, drawing the sword unjustly, and blind bigotries are prevented in Nahjul Balagha which is one of the most brilliant gems in the history of human development. Undoubtedly, a sound and Godly government is needed in order to keep divine values and to nourish humanity. Imagining the life without government is practically impossible. The existence of a government not only symbolizes the existence of other organizations, but also clarifies the existence of viewpoints, practical and behavioral methods. Nahjul Balagha and the noble Quran are genuine springs for bringing a Godly government into being which in turn endorses the welfare of humanity.

Paying attention to governors has prioritized in Nahjul Balagha. Most of the letters and lectures have been addressed to such issues in Nahjul Balagha. Paying attention to governors means paying attention to the foundation of a government. If the governors do well, other people will follow this trend. Nahjul Balagha is an important book because of its strategic and conscientious locality. This characteristic represents the subtle and God-centered governing in Ali's opinion. According to Marx's opinion, the government is a tool for governing of higher levels of the society and a guarantee for its continuation. As it is described in Nahjul Balagha, when Aqil – Ali's brother – asked for special advantages, Imam Ali responded him by a heated rod [to punish him]. It refers to the purity and delicacy of rules in Ali's worldview (Dashty, p, 327).

A government which is based on divine justice and sound rules does not allow the authority to abuse people even at the size of *a kilo of wheat*. Asking for advantages leads to corruption. In a government which is based on corruption, the oppressed accept their role as a puppet in the authoritarian's hand. Political power should not lead to economic power and Nahjul Balagha paid lots of attention to the oppressed people's right which is ignored because of political power of governors. Finally, it should be mentioned that people have been acquainted with many knowledgeable leaders such as Imam Ali and Jesus Christ who have summoned people to salvation. Vigorous and opportunist people try to monopolize others by establishing monopolistic theories. Certainly, an intellectual leader, a true follower of the prophet tradition and divine governing can save people from the disease of negligence through the public support. Some brilliant gems, including Nahjul Balagha or the noble Quran, are proper guidance for the people to achieve soundness of manner and human quality.

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