

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - The Caliphate Issue

Islamic Concept of office

According to the traditions, the Holy Prophet said in definite terms that he who seeks an office does not deserve it. It is, therefore, difficult to believe that Ali coveted the office of the caliphate at any stage. There are some passages in Nahj-ul-Balagha which show that Ali did not covet the office, but he held that the caliphate was his right. There is ample evidence in Nahj-ul-Balagha to the effect that Ali felt embittered at the election of Abu Bakr, Umar, or Othman. According to one passage, Ali is reported to have said that the son of Abu Qahafa (Abu Bakr) had worn the mantle of the caliphate forcibly although he knew that he (Ali) was as essential for the caliphate the handle is necessary for moving the grinding stone. There is some confusion on the point whether Ali considered himself to be the most deserving person to be the caliph. If the Holy Prophet had nominated Ali as his successor he would have automatically become the Caliph, and question of election by the people would not have arisen. As the Holy Prophet had made no nomination, the caliph had necessarily to be chosen by the people. Where the choice vested with the people, it was for the people to elect whosoever they deemed fit, and no person can claim to have the right to be chosen. In the circumstances, the position of Ali vis a vis the caliphate is vague. It is not clear on what basis it can be held that Ali had the right to be elected as the Caliph, and that if any other person had been elected as the Caliph, his right had been usurped.

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