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**Celebrating Hazrat Ali**

Ahead of the birth anniversary of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) this Friday (26th February/13th Rajab al murajab), the rich legacy from the life of the fourth caliph of Islam offers many enduring lessons.

Multiple historical sources have documented Hazrat Ali’s birth for having taken place inside the Kaaba in Mecca, when his mother, Bibi Fatima bint e Asad – the wife of Hazrat Abu Talib, the paternal uncle of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – entered the holy premises and gave birth to her youngest son.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) quickly formed a close bond with the newborn infant. It was this relationship which also saw Hazrat Ali (a.s.) becoming the first among the children of Mecca to publicly embrace Islam. The relationship evolved to the extent where Hazrat Ali (a.s.) married the Prophet's (pbuh) daughter Bibi Fatima (a.s.), and stepped up as the Prophet’s (pbuh) deputy on multiple occasions.

Known to this day as the bravest of the brave and the wisest of the wise, there is no singular trait to lead a tribute to Hazrat Ali. In narrations documented in ‘Nahjul Balagha’ – a text of sermons, letters and sayings of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) – there are lessons on a wide range of subjects from religion, statecraft and world affairs to principles of humanity and relations between individual members of a community.

Beyond this Friday’s remembrance which will see scores of Muslims paying their respects either at the Holy Kaaba or Hazrat Ali’s final resting place in Najaf e Ashraf, Iraq, it is vital to remember that few other individuals in the history of Islam have impressed Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike. In brief, Hazrat Ali’s legacy remains unique.

A widely acknowledged seventh century letter written by Hazrat Ali (a.s.) to Maalik al-Ashtar upon the latter’s appointment as governor of Egypt – then a province of the emerging Islamic empire – laid down some of the finest principles of statecraft and governance which remain relevant for all times to come. Listing the fundamental qualities of a fair and able ruler, Hazrat Ali (a.s.) wrote that a successful ruler must choose his subordinates wisely for their honesty, piety, trustworthiness and ability.

So powerful was the impact of this document that former UN secretary general Kofi Annan in a memorable speech recalled the lessons of governance and statecraft as delivered by Hazrat Ali (a.s.) in that historical letter. Across the world, many towering scholars have frequently commended Hazrat Ali (a.s.) and his words of wisdom, for offering a rich guidance to humanity for all times to come.

On the battlefield, some of the most memorable encounters between Muslims and their foes made Hazrat Ali (a.s.) a central figure in achieving a favorable outcome for the former. In the year 628 AD, an oft remembered battle on the plains of Khaybar known as ‘Ghazwa-e-Khaybar’ brought Hazrat Ali (a.s.) to the centre stage yet again. Hazrat Ali (a.s.) notably killed ‘Marhab’ – a prominent tribal chief with many previous victories under his belt – and led the Muslim army to conquer a well-protected fort near Medina.

To this day, the ‘Naara-e-Haideri’ or the battle cry in the name of Haider, a popular title for Hazrat Ali (a.s.) first given to him by his mother, frequently resonates across Pakistan. From sporting encounters to military engagements, the ‘Naara-e-Haideri’ remains a popular cry in daily lives. Similar gestures drawing inspiration from the life and multiple victories of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) have similarly become embedded in the popular culture in parts of the Middle East.

For Muslims at large, notably those confronting injustice, deprivation and tyranny, Hazrat Ali’s life offers many powerful lessons. It is hardly surprising that scholarly work inspired by Hazrat Ali’s many achievements has been undertaken by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Notwithstanding Hazrat Ali’s historical role among the first four rightly guided caliphs after Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) passed away, his followers today include Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It is an exceptionally powerful legacy that has few parallels in the history of humankind.

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