

The Significance of *Nahj-ul-Balaghah* in the Development of Muslim Theosophy: An Analytical Exposition

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Abstract

Nahj ul Balagah, the seminal work of wisdom by Ali ibn Talib (*Karm Allah Wajho*)¹ comprises the sermons, letters and sayings, delivered by him on various occasions during his life till his death. Every piece of writing in this work is exponent of his wisdom and his scholarship. The objective of this article is to highlight the role of Hazrat Ali's insight and wisdom in the history of theology and theosophy of Islamic history of thought. Moreover, the focus of this humble research is to bring into light the missing aspect of Hazrat Ali's personality as Theologian and Theosophist along-with to reveal the significance of his sermons and saying in the hot debates of that time theological sects and schools of thought. All his sermons, sayings and letters had been collected (Sharif al-Radi, 970 –1015 AD) and named as *Nahj ul Balagah*. This book has been read, quoted and revered but it is tragic fact that it had neither been given proper place nor understood impartially. In the same manner, the author, Hazrat Ali (KAW) had been respected and remembered as



valor, wise, generous and pious person but very little had been mentioned regarding his being as a Theologian and Theosophist. This research article would reveal the significance of this book, and its relevance regarding the theological or theosophical dimension of the problem of Muslim Theology and Theosophy.

Key words: Illah'yat, Attributes, *creatio ex nihilo*, Ilm-ul-Kalam, Metaphysics, Muslim Philosophy, Theology, Theosophy, Wisdom

I.1 Characteristics of Arab Social Structure before Islam

The geography of the Arab peninsula reveals two facts: that it has little relations to the external world and has been kept uninfluenced from the external onslaught of thoughts and ideologies. The other fact is that whatever they possessed as their cultural, social, political, moral, religious and intellectual assets (which comprising centuries of association and adherence), they follow it steadfastly as the pros and cons of their nomadic society.

I.2 Literary life of the Pre-Islam Arab Nomadic Life

On the social side, they were proud to have such uncontaminated customs, convention, values, polytheism, social hierarchy and traditions along-with their tribal structure of Bedouin life. On the literary and intellectual side, they had rhetoric, eloquence and poetry.² Rhetoric and eloquence were the ways to express oneself forcefully and argumentatively. But poetry played several roles such as expression of emotion, communication of historical events, eulogizing the heroes, condemnation of enemies, prompting valor, depreciation of cowardice, transmission of tribal pride and also arrogance. Poetry was generally oral and vocal. It was highly rich and cultivated. The poetic expressions were exponent of cultural unity and tradition.³ Besides poetry, the other literary aspect was oral tradition. Through this medium, they communicate history and genealogy and other worth communication in the form of stories. Prose literature was little and in the form of legal accounts, letters or pacts and agreements. But there were not any debates of wisdom or any system of theosophy on any schools of metaphysics but just eulogizing

the idols and their worship. These were the conditions of the Arabs before Islam. It was due to their limited vision and the pride of having their rich traditional values and deep-rooted customs and traditions that they resisted Islam as new mode of life.

2.1 The Significant Aspects of Ali life: The Holy Prophet's Love form Ali Ibn Talib

Ali Ibn Talib (*Karm* '13 Rajab, وَيَكْنُفِي فِي فِرَاشِهِ، وَأَنَا وَلِيدٌ يَضُمُّنِي إِلَى صَدْرِهِ، وَكَانَ يَمَضُغُ الشَّيْءَ ثُمَّ يَلْقَمُنِيهِ، وَيُمِسُّنِي جَسَدَهُ، وَيُشِمُّنِي عَرْفَهُ، وَمَا وَجَدَ لِي كَذِبَةً فِي قَوْلٍ، وَلَا خَطْلَةً فِي فِعْلٍ) in Prophet (PBUH). The Proph

وما وجد لي كذبة في قول، ولا خطلة في فعل

At the time, when I was only a kid, He (PBUH) took me into his lap. He (PBUH) was used to cling me and stuck me to his chest. He laid me beside him (PBUH) in his bed. He (PBUH) became closer to me and his body touched me so closely. He made me to smell the fragrance of his body. He was used to chew something at first and then fed me with it. He never found any traces of lie in my speaking or any weakness in the firmness of my any act.

When the Prophet (PBUH) started preaching Islam, he was the first child who embraced Islam being at the age of 10. Since then, he accompanied the Prophet (PBUH) in all circumstance till the death of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Later he had seen the eras of the three caliphates and he also became the fourth caliph and remained till his martyrdom (from 656 to 661).

2.2. The Scholarship of Ali Ibn Talib and the significance of His knowledge.

History is full of the narrations about the velour events, gallantry stories, acts of generosity, and narrations of wisdom and knowledge of *Hazrat Ali ibn Talib*. The Holy Prophet proclaimed that:

أَنَا مَدِينَةُ الْعِلْمِ وَعَلِيُّ بَابُهَا

I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate.

There is recognition for his knowledge but there is still a missing aspect of his role in the development of Muslim Theology. It would be incomplete if it is described without being mentioned the thoughts of Hazrat Ali regarding theology and theosophy. Moreover, the Holy Prophet professed his wisdom and insight besides his knowledge.

أَنَا دَارُ الْحِكْمَةِ وَعَلِيٌّ بَابُهَا

I am the Home of Wisdom and Ali is the Door (of the house).

But it is tragic approach of theologians and historians of philosophy of the world that this aspect of his personality had been ignored. No academic course or any academic learning has any content regarding Ali's contribution to theology, philosophy and theosophy.

All his life was associated with the Prophet (PBUH) and he learned from the Holy Prophet. About his learning and knowledge, he himself claimed that:⁶

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، سَلُونِي قَبْلَ أَنْ تَفْقِدُونِي، فَلَنَا بِطَرِيقِ السَّمَاءِ أَعْلَمُ مِنِّي بِطَرِيقِ الْأَرْضِ،

O' people, ask me whatever you want prior to that you don't find me, because I am surely familiar with the ways of the sky, more than the ways of the earth.

During this life he gave sermons, he wrote letters, gave pieces of advices. Every utterance was exponent of his wisdom and insight. All his sayings had been collected as a book and that collection has been known as *Nahj ul Balaghah* or the *Peak of Eloquence*.⁷

3.1. The Era of Intellectual Peace in the 'Muslims Thought'

In this above heading I have used the word 'Muslims Thought' instead of using Muslim philosophy or Muslim theology. The reason is very simple: Islam is a 'Din' which means *submission* and it had been revealed to the last Prophet (PBUH) and it was proclaimed complete and the finality of the Prophet-hood was assured.

The Arabs were very simple, traditionalist and resistant to follow novelty. After great resistance against new religion and afterwards embracing Islam, they were very enthusiastic in performing religious observances and showed

passionate attitude to ceremonial Islamic beliefs. Thus, generally and habitually, there was little need of intellectual probing, rationalist endeavors, reflective thought, logical reasoning, analytical inquisitiveness or hair-splitting argumentation. They were content in just following 'Din', the *Quran*, the *Sunnah* and the *Us'wah e Hasna* of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). That was overall attitude till the demise of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) on June 8, 632, and in the era of the First Caliph Hazrat Abu Baker (From 632 to 634 AD). Afterwards, in the rule of the later three caliphs, the geographical boundaries of the Islamic State seen expansion and territorial rule enhanced then the whole scenario changed.

3.2. The Contextual Atmosphere for Rational Theology

The most relevant aspect of worth discussion here is: due to the geographical expansion and inclusion of new people having various mind sets, divergent cultural values, diversity of religious affiliation *i.e.* Polytheism, Trinity, Dualism, Paganism or Heathens along-with conversion into Islamic metaphysics but mentally saturated into the various notions of metaphysics, there emerged new dimensions of thought and novel problem in Muslim Theology. Moreover, the other issue was the inheritance of Greek influence and teachings of Plato, Aristotle and Neo-Platonism. The Greco- Christian imprints on minds with rationality and the role of Mysticism, Sufism, **Asceticism**, Monk-ism coupled the problems for existing Muslim Theology. Consequently, the era of new rational theology and theosophy commenced.

3.3. The Unavailability of Rational and Balanced Gratification for Theological Problems

In those circumstances, there was created a mental dissatisfaction and disappointment because Islam was simple religion having clear-cut beliefs with simple demand of submission and a modest system of metaphysics. But now the newly converted people desired the mental satisfaction on the rational grounds. Thus, there was a need to fulfill the gap of mental

contentment between the older followers of Islam and the newly converted people.

3.4. The Gravity of The Dialectical Controversies.

The pivotal concept of Islam is unity of God but the older fellows of Trinity and followers of *Yazdan* and *Ahrman* were unable to determine how the problem of Evil can be solved while there is only One God. If He is One then the source of Evil and the Good is in the same being. How it was Possible? The problem of *The Eternal Sin* and *The Salvation* and the reward for the Christ's Sacrifice for his Sons was bothering the Christians. The day of Judgment along-with *The Meezan* were mentally disturbing because The Christ had favoured them. The concept of reward and punishment in presence of and Omnipotence God and *Loh-e-Mehfooz* created the problem of Free Will and Predestination. In that case there was no solace. The controversy between The God's Being and the Eternity of His Attributes related to the Unity of God and the problem of *Shirk* coupled with Christ's status as the Son of God, the presence of the Holy Ghost and the Return *Imam Mahdi as well as* the Created-ness or Un-created-ness of the Quran in association with the attribute of *Kalam*, the Creation of the Universe *Ex Nihilio* or the Eternity of Universe, the primordial status of Matter or supremacy of mind as well as the eternal or accidental status of anyone, problem of Grave Sin, Reason or Revelation as Source of Knowledge, God's Beatific Vision with eyes or just a metaphysical vision, the Concept of *Me'raaj* as material travelling or spiritual elevation, all these were the mental occupation and centers of rational discussions at that time. The Pagans who had long lasting affiliation with divinities and idols were in dilemma that how, without the help of various divinities, the work of this infinite universe could be run by a single God. The concept of Omnipotent and Omniscient God and His relationship to Universe and the man along-with the role and status of human being was in demand for satisfaction.

The Heathens were in want of rational satisfaction and logical arguments for acceptance of any set of dogmas of beliefs. But they were either un-replied or there were answered from the Holy references which they had not still accepted then they became dejected and unsatisfied. They were wanted just to accept religion and then make arguments but in the paradigm of religious domain and that was unacceptable for them. Thus, there was a reign of mental unrest and demand for satisfying theology in general along-with substantial theosophy especially.

3.5. The Emergence of Various Schools and Sects.

After the demise of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and in the periods of Caliphates, there appeared certain theological groups but they could not be regarded as schools of theology because their ideas and activities were not as theological contribution in terminological sense and they were mere reactions to certain controversies yet they added something to the news rational developments in the new theology. The Khariji'ites, the Murjia'ites and the Waeedi'ites were the prominent sects of groups. They were playing their role not philosophically or theo-sophically but following their own ideologies yet they were making contributions to the new rational paradigm.

3.6. The Systematic Development of Rational Theology and Theosophy

The Muslims had the Quran and *Sunnah* which were completed at the demise of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as well as they had the guidance of Hazrat Ali the fourth Caliph who was martyred in 661 AD that meant the source of wisdom and guidance completed. He provided the guidance and wisdom in the form of Addresses, Sermons, Letters, pieces of Advices and Question –Answer manner. (All these are now available as a book i.e. *Nahj ul Balagh*).

After his death, the continuing political turmoil enhanced and the sorrowful event, the Battle of Karbala (10 October 680 CE) occurred. After that incident and to save the kingship and providing rational solace to the masses, some theological dialectics, philosophical problems and theosophical clichés

raised their heads. Consequently, there occurred such debates as the Free Will and Predestination. All aimed to console the people that the martyrdom of the *Ahl-e-Bait* and the progeny of Hazrat Ali, was Predestined and the Will of God. Thus, the rulers and the throne were not responsible for the sad incident of Karbala. That political attempt, though not directly yet influentially contributed to the gradual development of theosophical ideas and it helped in systematic establishing of theological schools and theosophy. According to some scholar, the first abstract problem that led the subsequent course of theological discussions was the controversy of the Predestination and Free Will or the issue of *Qaz'a-O-Qad'ar*.⁸

3.7. The Emergence and Establishment of Theological and Theosophical Schools (600-800 AD)

After the death of Hazrat Ali (661 AD), though there was available the legacy of Hazrat Ali's wisdom as sermons, sayings, letters as a source of guidance for theological and theosophical guidance but history refers to it very little. Due to purpose of achieving the sovereigns' goals and political maneuverer, the reference to the wisdom or rationality of Hazrat Ali was not focused. Because that reference was associated to *Karbala* thus the social structure and political atmosphere was at stake so that source of wisdom was veiled. After gradual establishment of government, state and smoothness in the political environment, the theological debates turned into philosophical problems and they were conducted on the basis of wisdom and rationality. The discussion was led by above mention groups in general but by the Traditionalist or Asha'rites, the Rationalist or Mutazila'ites in particular. The First systematic schools of theology were founded by Jahm (d.745) and Wasil (d.748).⁹ Both gained popularity and the content of discussions was comprised on all the prevailing issues. But they differed radically in their manners of finding solutions.

At that time, there were many other schools having rational approach but their particular domain was the law not the theological debates. Among the

Sunnis which on the basis of their rational approach can be mention here, they were known as Schools of Law or *Madhhab*. These schools were Hanfi, Hanbli, Maliki and Shafi. These were founded on the basis of the *Usual e Fiqh*. Founder of the schools were Malik ibn Ans (died 179/795), Abu Hanifa (died 150/767), Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shafi (died. 2055/820), Ahmad ibn Hanbal (241/855).¹⁰ In the same manner there were many schools in Shi'ites. The most celebrated was the Ja'fari school (known as *As'na e Asheri* or the Twelver) as well as the *Zaydis*.¹¹ The Muslims were to accept and follow any of them. That meant that the theological and philosophical aspects had taken another type of rationality e.g. the explanations of the laws.

But the development of philosophical investigations, in the history of the Islamic theology or *Kalam* started in the eight centuries and that that was on account of Greco-Cristiano influences.¹² The foundations of Islamic philosophical schools were indebted to the translations of the Greek works of Greek Masters into Arabic.¹³ The first Arab philosopher was Abu Yusuf Yaqub b. Ishaq al-Kindi (185/801 – 260/873).¹⁴

4.1 The Nature and Worth of *Nahj-al-Balaghah*

The *Nahj-al-Balaghah* (*The Way of Eloquence*) comprises on the sermons, saying and the utterances credited to Ali Ibn Talib. This book is an encyclopedia of Islamic culture, history, political environment, theological guidance, rationality, rhetoric, wisdom and theosophy. Its nature can be determined by the fact that it was written by Ali who was the first cousin, follower and companion of the Holy Prophet since his age of being ten years. He had personally witnessed all the periods of history of the life of Prophet (PBUH) and observed the condition of the early three caliphates and he was full aware of all the aspects and events of history.

The literary worth of this book is that it served as “model for the use of Arabic” in the same way as Cicero’s speeches had done for Latin. Ali ibn Talib (KAW) was the first who “laid down the rules of formal Arabic

grammar” particularly with the description that language “made up of nouns, verbs and particles” as it was done by Aristotle in the West. Moreover, it was perhaps due to Ali that the Greek rationalist philosophers had been absorbed in this regard. He assumed the role of a representative and spokesman as well as the mirror of different thoughts, philosophies and ideologies and thereby he got the inspiring and epic character.¹⁵ Keeping in view the discovery of the real status of *Nah-al-Balaghah* as a treatise of Theology, *Tractatus* of Wisdom and an anthology of Theosophy, it is essential to define the terms at first and later to determine the status of *Nahj-al-Balaghah* as a source of theology, wisdom and theosophy.

4.2. Defining the terms ‘Theology’, ‘Philosophy’ and ‘Theosophy’ and Determining the Status of *Nahj-al-Balaghah*

4.2.a. The term *Theology* (Greek: *Theos*: god + *Logia*: a study) refers to branch of knowledge that deals with the doctrines or discourses concerning the existence and laws of gods/God and man’s relation to the divinities. It is a particular system or a set of beliefs regarding divinities and related matters. Very often it embraces the whole field of religion. There are many branches belong to this great domain of knowledge e.g. *Revealed Theology, Natural Theology, Biblical Theology, Muslim Theology, Moral Theology*.¹⁶ Presently, this is known as *Ilh’yat* (الهيئات). Moreover, this term refers to the literary works associated to the gods and their doings in Greek mythology mentioned by Homer and Hesiod as well as the works by Plato and Aristotle what they speculated and wrote about the ultimate principles or supreme reality. Later, this term occupied the contents referring to the Logos, the God’s beings and attributes, man’s knowledge about them. It included other concepts of religion such as life, death, sin, immortality, nature of the world and the man. Thus, theology is a branch of knowledge that systematizes, organizes, correlates the matters of religio- human affair in such a way that can provide a unified scheme of coherent body of doctrines which can satisfy the human mind’s search for truth and guidance. Precisely, religion is wider

while theology is the science of religion and theology furnishes religion with the affairs and matter which the later deals.¹⁷

4.2.b. *The Nahj-al-Balaghah* as a Source of Theology

The contents of the *Nahj-al-Balaghah* had a great number of references regarding the subjects such as *God, Unity of God, Attributes of God, States of Shirk, Creation of the Universe as Ex Nihilio, the Origin of the World, Problem of Evil, God's Relationship to Human Beings, Nature of Human Beings, Problem of Death, Life Here-After, Ethical Teachings, Concept of Prayer*. All these subjects belonged to the domain of Theology, thus *Nahj al-Balaghah* must be recognized as a great reference of theological knowledge.

After the Quran and *Sunnah*, it is the most relevant content for guidance regarding Islamic Theology. It is a common heritage of all Muslims as essential part of wisdom and guidance. But we all should be unbiased and must accept *Nahj al-Balaghah* as common inheritance of all human beings generally and common legacy of all Muslims particularly.

4.3. the term 'Philosophy', (Greek: Philo: Love + Sophi: Wisdom = Love for Wisdom) also known as Metaphysics, designates the subject which deals with Ontology (the science of Beings) and Epistemology (The science of the theories of Knowledge). The Word Wisdom is an abstract ability. Knowledge depends on the information from senses or the reason but Wisdom lies in the use of the knowledge properly without the bondage of present limitation. Information and Knowledge can be learnt and acquired but wisdom cannot be. Quran used the word *Hikmah* for *Wisdom*. As Quran said:¹⁸

وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا

And whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good.

4.3.b. Hazrat Ali said about himself and for his *Ahl e bait*.¹⁹

تَاللّٰهِ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُ تَبْلِيغَ الرِّسَالَةِ، وَإِتْمَامَ الْعِدَاتِ، وَتَمَامَ الْكَلِمَاتِ. وَعِنْدَنَا .
أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ . أَبْوَابُ الْحُكْمِ وَضِيَاءُ الْأُمْرِ

I know, by Allah, how to convey the messages, and how to fulfill the promises and how to deliver the real expressions. We the *Ahlu'l - bayt* (persons of the home of the Prophet) keep the gates of wisdom and lights of governance.

Thus, by describing the nature of philosophy as well as the contents of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, it has been manifested that this book has a large number of common problems which are the contents of philosophy. The *Ahl-e-Bait* as upholder of wisdom, the wisdom as common legacy of every Muslim and *Nahj al-Balaghah* having common problems to philosophy and philosophy being the science of wisdom, they all have close affinity and relationship. Thus, *Nahj al-Balaghah* must be a part of the subject of philosophy and it surely is but not recognized.

4.4. the term Theosophy, (Greek: *Theos*: God + *Sophia*: *Wisdom*) defines 'The Divine Wisdom'. It is a branch of knowledge that combines philosophy, theology and science. Theosophy is process discovery.²⁰ That is what Allama Iqbal had considered the third stage of religious understanding e.g. 'Discovery'.²¹ *Theosophy* possesses the same features and contents of problems which religion discusses primarily and philosophy deals generally. So, what is the criterion that can enable us to distinguish between the philosophical problems and religious ones? Religion first of all demand's acceptance of certain beliefs. Its source of knowledge is intuition. It claims to provide solace and salvation to its followers. It has elements of adoration, fear and reverence for a powerful being. While in philosophy there are no set of revered beliefs and its source of knowledge is rooted in observation, intellect and analysis along-with criticism. It has no reference of fear or reward based attitude. It has no following of established sets of believers and accepts nothing without criticism as someone had well said that Socrates is dear to us but truth is dearer to us. Philosophy is a search for truth and reality.

4.4.b. Theosophy starts with affirming certain concepts which have intuitive roots (as belongs to theology) and it encompasses certain imaginative

grounds. Philosophy and theosophy depend on their own and exhibit self-reliance.²² Theosophy is the discipline of sublimation;²³ it is the higher stage of knowledge and wisdom. This is such insight which is above senses and temporal circumstances. Many references are there in the Holy Testaments e.g. the Wisdom of Solomon. Quran explicitly had drawn a line of demarcation between the knowledge of the book and the wisdom.²⁴

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ
وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

So We sent among you, a Courier (a Prophet) who is from among you. So that he might read (and clarify) to you Our Aa'yats and purify your spirits' hearts and teaches you the Book and the Wisdom and instructs you that which you didn't know earlier.

In the light of this description I will prove that *Nahj al-Balaghah* has discusses the same problems with more sublimed approach even more than theology and philosophy so this book must be considered as a of theology, philosophy or more accurately the book of Theosophy.

5. The Role of Asha'rites and the Muta'zilites in Developing New Rational Theosophy

The consequences of geographical expansion, the conversion of religion, the political upheaval, discontents of civil masses, the demise of Hazrat Ali, the event of the Karbla and change in the nature of sovereignty, all these elements marked the emergence of several theological sects and theosophical schools of thought and philosophical movements. All these created a new epistemological paradigm of debates, dialectics and rationality. Besides mentioned earlier groups and sects, there were two prominent schools of theological, philosophical and theosophical thought which ruled the domain of knowledge of that time. They were the Asha'rites and the Muta'zilites. They had some common problems but contrary approaches of thoughts and conflicting manners of solving the problems. These debates took the political patronage and the scenario became violent.

As Hazrat Ali pointed out and said:²⁵

إِنَّ كَلَامَ الْحُكَمَاءِ إِذَا كَانَ صَوَاباً كَانَ دَوَاءً، وَإِذَا كَانَ خَطأً كَانَ دَاءً

If the words and utterances of the wise are correct, they are a cure, and if they are wrong, they are a disease.

6. The Lacuna of Muslim History of Thought

Here the objective of this article is to highlight the lacuna of Islamic history of thought that the schools²⁶ ignored the teachings of Hazrat Ali. The wisdom of Ali must had been approached just for the sake of guidance and for the solutions of that time theosophical problems. As it has been proved earlier that Ali's wisdom was the paradigm of the three fields of knowledge mentioned above. But his wisdom and *Hikmat* was ignored. That was not the point that he was not aware of the solution of the problems but it was just a matter of politics. While He had already warned the people about himself:²⁷

فَأَسْأَلُونِي قَبْلَ أَنْ تَفْقِدُونِي

So, ask me whatever you want to know, before it happened that you would not find myself among you.

7. The Significant Polemics and Substantial Glitches of that time

The scenario of that time was marked by violent discussions, bitter dialectics, imposing *fatawas* on one-another, passionate following of the leaders and intellectual controversies. The mental dissatisfaction, freedom of speech and fierce argumentation ignited some controversial debates and raised many issues. Regarding the solutions, every group presented the verses of the Holy Quran, references from Hadiths and even they presented experimental evidence and rational dialectics to support their own views. But alas, none had given any references to the insight and wisdom of Hazrat Ali. The cardinal and famous issues which set the stage of debates were:

- The Unity of God and His Attributes: (their nature and relation to God)
- God's Beautific Vision (with material Eyes or just a state)
- Creation of the Universe: (Ex Nihilo or Co-eternal)
- God's Knowledge (Particulars or Absolute)

- Determinism or Free Will (Jabri'ites, Qadri'ites, Murjiate and Waedi'ites)
- Nature of Faith and Problem of Grave Sin
- The Quran: its Created-ness or Eternality as *Kalam Ullah*
- Reason or Revelation

7.1.a. The Unity of God and His Attributes: (their nature and relation to God) and Hazrat Ali's Solution

Islam is monotheistic religion. The idea of God is pivotal in religion. The whole life of the Muslim depends on this concept. The Holy Quran clearly and forcefully emphasized this concept in many verses but especially in the Sura Akhlas (No. 112). But the debates of the *Sifatiya* or *Mujsmia* schools along-with *Murji'a* and *Waedi'a*, the people of Free Will and Determinists created an atmosphere of bitter controversies. The *Sifatiya* hold the view to accept God's attribute in the same literal sense as God Himself had mentioned in the Quran i.e. God's hand is on their hands (Sura 48:10), everything is subject to destruction except His face (Sura 28:88). The *Mujasmia's* concept conveyed the *Anthropomorphic* idea of God. All those debates contaminated the central concept of God's Unity thus the Mu'tazil'lites focused the idea of Unity of God and its corollary the idea of God's attributes. Duo to emphasis on this they were called the upholders of Unity and Justices.

The Mu'tazil'lites objected that if we took the attributes of God in the literal sense then the attributes would become eternal. Thus, due to the eternity of the attributes we would commit Shirk which is the heinous sin because God never forgive the Shirk. Thus, for maintaining God's Unity, they refused the eternity of God's attributes and said they are just the modes of the activity of God. Resultantly they were charged of 'denial of attributes. Because that denial was not acceptable to the common masses who believed in the literal sense of the terms e.g. God's having the eyes for seeing his creations, ears for listening the prayers of His people, the existence of the Arsh, the Thorn of God, the Angels, the Meezan. In that controversy, the Asha'riets adopted the

mediatory position and preached that the attributes really exist but it is not legitimate to ask 'why and how' about them, that idea was known as *bila kifah wala tashbih* (بلا كيفه والا تسبيهم) or idea of *mukhalifa* (مخالفة). They hold that attributes are neither included in God's Being nor they are separated from Him. The reality of the question is beyond the capacity of human beings. But that reply was not intellectually satisfying.

7.1.b. Hazrat Ali's solution to the controversy of The Unity of God and His Attributes

Though the controversy was silenced but not replied. Thus, the genius of Hazrat Ali had already addressed this question. He had already mentioned the attributes in his sermons.

أول الدين معرفته، وكمال معرفته التصديق به، وكمال التصديق به توحيده، وكمال توحيده الاخلاص له، وكمال الاخلاص له
نفى الصفات عنه، لشهادة كل صفة أنها غير الموصوف، وشهادة كل موصوف أنه غير الصفة، فمن وصف الله سبحانه فقد
قرنه، ومن قرنه فقد نأه، ومن نأه فقد جزأه، ومن جزأه فقد جهله، ومن جهله فقد أشار إليه، ومن أشار إليه فقد خذله، ومن
خذله فقد عداه، ومن قال: فيم فقد ضمنه، ومن قال: علم فقد أخلى منه.

The principal thing in religion is to acknowledge God. The excellence of His acknowledgment is to verify Him. The perfection of His verification is to have faith in His Oneness. The excellence of faith in Allah's Oneness is to consider Him as Pure. The excellence of purity is to repudiate His attributes. Because the presence of attributes is evidence that it is dissimilar from the Being to which it has been attributed. Everything, to which something has been attributed, is dissimilar from that attribute. Thus, if any person ascribes any attribute to Allah, it means the person identified Allah's like. Anyone who identified His like, he regards Him Two, if anyone regarded Him two, the person recognized His parts. In that case the person mistook and misunderstood Him. Anyone who mistook Him, pointed to Him, if so, then the person recognized limitations on Him. In accepting limitation on Him means numbered Him. If anyone said that: in whatever He is, the person holds that He is enclosed and contained. If anyone thought that on whatever He is, the person holds that He is not on something other than that. That clear cut sermon was there but not referred in books of the problems of Muslim theology.

7.2.a The problem of the Eternity of God and Coeternity or *creatio ex nihilo* of the World

The problem of the *Eternity of God and the Creation of the Universe* and its Relation to God has had been a cardinal issue in the philosophy and theology. This is other side of the problem of *Unity and Multiplicity* of the Universe as well as the problem of *Rest and Motion*.

The debate was that if God was the Absolute Unity in all respects that meant there was no flaw in Him. So, why He thought to create the universe? New creation meant the change in His Absolute of Absolute Will or the *Loh e Mahfooz*. That change signified flaws that there was remained something undone. it was objection to His Absolute Unity, omnipotence and All-Knowing Personality also. Therefore, to save God's completeness, it was essential that their must not to be any change. If so then, in that case the Universe must be supposed to be co-eternal to God. But that meant Shirk because God and the Universe becomes co-eternal and that the meant multiplicity of co-eternal things. That reply was also unacceptable. Philosopher said that God was Essential Being but other were contingent existences. God is primarily and logically first but the Universe was logically secondary. That solution did not solve the issue. Consequently, Al-Farabi presented the theory of Ten Intellects ²⁹and other version of Emanation. But that too was unable to solve the issue of *Co-eternity* or *Ex Nihilo* Creation, *Unity and Multiplicity* and *Rest and Motion*. The problem remained unsolved.

7.2. b Hazrat Ali Defined God's Eternity as:³⁰

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الْأَوَّلِ قَبْلَ كُلِّ أَوَّلٍ، وَالْآخِرِ بَعْدَ كُلِّ آخِرٍ، بِأَوَّلِيَّتِهِ وَجَبَ أَنْ لَا أَوَّلَ لَهُ، وَبِآخِرِيَّتِهِ وَجَبَ أَنْ لَا آخِرَ لَهُ.

Allah is the First before each and every first. He is the Last after each and every whatever is last. His Primary-ness and First-ness essentialized that there is no (other than Him) first, prior to Him. As well as His Last-ness

essentialized that there is no other than Him which is the Last after Him as everlasting.

7.2.c. He said about the Eternity and Uniqueness of God:³¹

الدَّالُّ عَلَى قَدَمِهِ بِخُدُوثِ خَلْقِهِ، وَبِخُدُوثِ خَلْقِهِ عَلَى وُجُودِهِ، وَبِاشْتِبَاهِهِمْ عَلَى أَنْ لَا شَبَهَ لَهُ،

He proved His eternity by the occurrences of contingent existences and He proved His Being by the existence of accidental creations. Due to the similarities and resemblance among the things, He established His Uniqueness and that there is nothing like Him.

7.2.d He said *ex nihilo* (out of nothing):³²

وَبِمَا اضْطَرَّهَا إِلَيْهِ مِنَ الْفَنَاءِ عَلَى دَوَامِهِ،

He, due to the creation of the things from nothingness (*ex nihilo*) proved His eternity. And due to the signs of dependency and humbleness of the contingent things and His omnipotence over them, He proved the evidence of His eternity.

7.2.e. God's C

تَنَاهَتْ بِهِ الْغَايَاتِ فَعَظَمَتْهُ تَجَسُّيداً بَلْ كَبُرَ شَأْنًا، وَعَظَمَ سُلْطَانًا

His greatness does not mean that He is extended limitlessly and due to this He is seen as a magnified incarnated embodiment. He is not great in the sense that His body is extremely extended. But His greatness means that He is exalted in grandeur and utmost authority.

Thus he clearly exhibited that God is eternal, and everything else is created from *ex nihilo*.

7.3.a The Problem of Beatific Vision of God.

The common Muslims had a belief that they would see the God with their own eyes, as the highest reward and blessing of God on the day of Judgment or in the Heavens. But the Mutazil'ites proclaimed that was not possible to see God with the physical eyes. We would see the God due to the light of the heart. They presented the verses of the Quran that no vision can see him but

He can see all (sura 6:I03). Moreover, for seeing anything certain conditions must be fulfilled i.e. the subject must not be too near nor too far away, it must not be so tiny nor it must be so big; thus, these conditions could not apply to God so His Beautiful Vision is not possible through eyes. On the other side, the Asha'rites propagated the possibility of God's Vision. They presented the verses of the Quran: Some faces will be so bright on that day and they will be looking at their Lord (Sura 75:22-23). They emphasized the possibility of seeing the God. Moreover, Moses asked: O God, reveal to me Yourself. Allah replied to him that you cannot see me, see the mountain and if it remained as it is, then you can see me (Sura 7:I43). Asha'rites concluded that the Vision is possible due to some conditions otherwise the Prophet Moses would not ask for the Vision of God.

7.3. b Hazrat Ali described concept of the Beautiful Vision of God as:³⁴

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الشَّوَاهِدُ، وَلَا تُخَوِّيهِ الْمُنْشَاهِدُ، وَلَا تُرَاهُ النَّوَاطِرُ، وَلَا تُحْبِبُهُ السَّوَابِرُ،

Praise be to the God, to whom the observers cannot find Him, spaces cannot enclose Him, eyes cannot perceive Him, veils cannot hide Him.

تَتَلَقَّاهُ الْأَذْهَانُ لَا بِمُشَاعِرَةٍ،

Minds admit of Him without (any activity of the) senses.

He proclaimed that:³⁵

لَيْسَ إِدْرَاكُهُ بِالْأَبْصَارِ

His perception is not *لَا تَفْعُ الْأَوْهَامُ لَهُ عَلَى صِفَةٍ، وَلَا تُعْقَدُ الْقُلُوبُ مِنْهُ عَلَى كَيْفِيَّةٍ،*

He elaborated it vividly

وَلَا تَقَالَةُ التَّجْزِئَةُ وَالتَّبَعِيعُ، وَلَا تُحِيطُ بِهِ الْأَبْصَارُ وَالْقُلُوبُ

Imagination is not able to understand any of His attributes. The Hearts cannot comprehend them. Division into parts and Analysis cannot be applied to Him. Nothing can encompass Him even heart and eyes.

He elaborated that God cannot be seen:³⁷

وقد سألته ذعبلت اليماني فقال: هل رأيت ربك يا أميرالمؤمنين؟

Dhi'lib al-Yamani asked to (Hazrat Ali) Amir al-Mu'minin: whether he had seen Allah)

لا تُدرِكه الغيُورُ بمشاهدة العيان، ولكن تُدرِكه القلوبُ بحقائق الأيمان

Hazrat Ali replied: Eyes are not able to see Him face to face. But hearts only can perceive Him through the belief in the realities of faith.

8. Conclusion:

To conclude this article is not an easy task. The topic encircled great fields of knowledge e.g. theology, philosophy and theosophy as well as great variety of multi-dimensional aspects of the same problems. Moreover, to highlight Hazrat Ali's wisdom through his sermon (which were later collected as *Nahaj al Balagha* in the 10th century), and searching the answer which were replied before his death in 661 but question appeared in the beginning of 8th century was difficult task. But it revealed his genius that he presented the answer even the questions had not been seen and he foresaw the future upcoming debates. Moreover, to prove, *Nahaj al Balagh* as having common topics of the three disciplines of knowledge enhanced the problems. But it has been proved that *Nahj-ul-Balaghah* possesses the contents that are common to the three above mentioned fields. And this book is an important work for discussion about the problems of the above three domains of Knowledge. The concluding remarks are: that every field of knowledge has its own pros and cons.

That is what Allama Iqbal had described the three stages of understanding the religious realities e.g. the first is 'Faith' which is appropriate for common masses and this is the stage of 'Theology'; the second stage is 'Thought' that is the field of 'Philosophy' and the rational people belonged to it, lastly there is the stage of 'Discovery',³⁸ that field is exponent of Theosophy. This is the highest stage of religious understanding and this has been named as the stage of *Marifat* as well. I have proved that The *Nahj al Balaghah* possessed all the three stages, but its epitome role is its contribution to theosophy which included the other two fields also. That is why, it is a source of guidance and

wisdom for all levels of religious understandings and for all levels of knowledge for all people.

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- ⁵ Ali Ibn Talib, *Nahaj ul Balagh (Urdu)*. Sermon 191, Edited by Syed Sharif Al-Razi. (Lahore: Shia General Book Agency, 1394 H), 581.
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The content of *Nahj ul Balagaha* has been compiled by Sharif al-Radi (970–1015 AD). He was celebrated Shia scholar.
Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad bin al-Ḥussain Bin Mūsā Al-Abrash Al-Mūsawī famous as al-Sharīf al-Raḍī. His father's name was Abu Ahmad al-Hussain Ibn Musa who was progeny of Ibrahim al-Asghar, who was the 7TH Shia Imam named Musa Kazim.
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²⁶ Sharif, pp 199-243. For the Mutazi'ites theories see pp199-219 and for Asha'rite debates see pp 220-243.

²⁷ Ali, Sermon 93, pp 356.

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³⁰ Ali, Sermon 101, pp 370.

³¹ Ali, Sermon 184, pp 545.

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