

COLOUR BAR AND DISCRIMINATION: PRACTICALLY REJECTED IN ISLAM

It was during the time of Ali b. Abi Talib (A.S), when he had just assumed the caliphate of the Muslim Ummah. He declared his policy that he was not going to tolerate any sort of discrimination or favouritism. Once as he was about to commence distribution from Bayt al Ma'al – the public treasury, he gave a sermon in which he said:

“Oh people! Right from the first, no body came to this world as a slave-boy or slave-girl. All are born free. This moment some money has arrived and I intend to distribute it equally”

Thereafter he distributed the money equally, giving three dinars to everyone. A man from Ansars (helpers) received three and a black slave also was paid three dinars. On seeing this, the man from Ansar raised his voice in objection, saying:

“Oh Amir ul Mo'mineen! This is a slave whom I set free only yesterday. Why do you treat me and him equally”

Ali b. Abi Talib (A.S) in reply explained:

“I have gone through the book of Allah and no where have I found distinction of one person on another.”

(Al-Kafi p.469)

What a splendid and practical rejection of discrimination and class society based upon colour or creed. So concerned was Ali b. Abi Talib (A.S) during his lifetime that he would not tolerate any practice that encouraged bias and class difference.

Once date-sellers in Kufa had adopted a system of grading dates into superior and inferior qualities, each of the 2 grades being sold at specially different price. The Imam refused them from doing so and exerted them both the grades in mixed form at one price. Obviously, this meant that the main item of food on the land to be evenly shared and consumed by the rich and the poor.

It is mentioned that once a quarrel ensued between a black man in Madina and Abdul Rahman b. Auf – one of the wealthiest Arabs of the time. He while in the state of extreme rage, told the slave:

“Oh! You the son of a black man”

The Prophet of Islam became deeply upset on being informed of this incidence. He rebuked Abdul Rahman by saying:

“No son of a white man has any superiority over a black one except with piety and submission to the truth.”

Thus we see that no religion other than Islam has so vehemently rejected colour bar and discrimination in practice. It has proclaimed the general principle that man is born free to enjoy equal rights as can be noted from the following words of Ali b. Abi Talib (A.S):

“People are born to remain free and enjoy equal rights.”