

RACIAL AND COLOUR BAR-

ISLAMIC CONDEMNATION IN PRACTICE

It was during his active caliphate when, Ali a.s. once on pulpit was addressing the people of Madina. He declared that he was not going to discriminate. He would not differentiate between one Muslim against another on the question of distribution from Bay-tul-mal (the state treasury). He would not favour anyone by even one dirham. He would not entertain any bias and accord more favourable treatment to anyone. All were to be treated as equals.

Hearing that statement from the gathering, Akil- the brother of Ali a.s. raised his voice loudly. He asked whether he (being the Caliph's brother) would be looked upon on the same level as a black man (a slave of lower race) in Madina? Looking rather enraged at such a question, Ali a.s. retorted "Sit down! Was there no one else to speak from the gathering but yourself? On what basis could you claim superiority over a black man except faith and piety? (provided these existed in you)

From the foregoing, we arrive at the following conclusions:

- a) That the question of colour discrimination has been existing since those olden days.
- b) That to Ali a.s. ~~this question~~ this question was so abhorring that he reacted sharply even to his own brother when it was raised.
- c) When as caliph of the Muslim Ummah, Ali a.s. was strict in the equitable distribution of the state wealth to the people for their economic upliftment.

The fact is that in Islam all are looked upon as equal irrespective of colour, creed, tribe or ancestry. No one is considered as superior to another except on the basis of faith and piety. The holy Qura'n refers to this in these words:

"O MANKIND! WE HAVE CREATED YOU MALE AND FEMALE AND HAVE MADE YOU NATIONS AND TRIBES THAT YOU MAY KNOW ONE ANOTHER SURELY THE MOST HONOURABLE OF YOU WITH ALLAH IS THE ONE AMONG YOU MOST RIGHTEOUS (Sura Hujarat v.13)

In the logic of the holy Qura'n, people have been created with differentiating colour, ~~creed~~ creed or race to enable them to recognize and establish good human relationship and not hate each other.

In the interpretation and commentary on the above ayat, Ibne Abbas is mentioned to have said that a slave had conveyed ^{his} her message and requested for a hand in marriage with a beautiful girl from the tribe of Bani Beyadha. The Prophet recommended to the family members of the girl to accept the message. They in reply said: "Oh Prophet of Allah, Do you want us to give away our daughters to our slaves?"

When this talk was going on, the above ayat of the holy Qura'n was revealed and thus the discrimination existing among the Arabs of the pre-Islamic times came to an end. The Prophet is reported to have said:

"ALL OF YOU ARE THE SONS OF ADAM AND ADAM WAS CREATED FROM CLAY THOSE WHO REFER TO THEIR PARENTS AND CONSIDER THEMSELVES AS SUPERIOR TO OTHERS SHOULD NOW ABANDON THIS BELIEF OTHERWISE FROM ALLAH THEY WOULD ENJOY NO ELEVATED STATUS"

Again in his farewell sermon, the Prophet is reported to have said:

"OH PEOPLE I VERILY ALLAH HAS REMOVED FROM YOU YOUR PRE-ISLAMIC HAUGHTINESS AND BOASTING ABOUT YOUR FOREFATHERS. ALL OF YOU ARE DESCENDED FROM ADAM AND ADAM WAS MADE FROM DUST. THERE EXISTS NO SUPERIORITY OF ARABS OVER NON-ARABS EXCEPT WITH PIETY

(Fajrul Islam)

In another statement, the Prophet had said:

"PEOPLE ARE ALL EQUAL LIKE THE TEETH OF A COMB"

(Man La Yazhurul Faqeeh)

The distinctive feature of Islam is that its message was not confined to Arabia nor to any chosen tribe or race. With belief in One God as its foundation stone, there is no more than one religion to which all people of the world are invited. To give the message of Islam a universal appeal and establish Islamic brotherhood and equality, we find it took a practical turn in the form of letters which Prophet Mohammad s.a. sent in the sixth year after Hegira to the then rulers and kings of that age. The Prophet wrote to the rulers of Rome, Persia, Yemen, Egypt and Abyssinia inviting them to Islam. It will also be noted that the converts to Islam then included people of different races and tribes and from different countries.

The fact is that no other religion but Islam has succeeded in showing a practicable path of human equality free of all racial prejudice and barrier. In the light of the foregoing Islamic teachings, it behoves every true Muslim not to harbour any prejudice against another Muslim.