

Saqqa (one who quenches the thirst); the Celebrated Title (.Hadrat Abbas (A.S

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?>

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) said, "The most superior deed before Allah is to satiate the thirst of the thirsty, even if it be an animal." (Darrusslam, vol. 3, pg. 162)

The relation between water and life is extremely close and one that cannot be denied on any account. Water is not only the source of life in this universe, but is also fundamental to the continuation and survival of our existence. It enjoys the status of being no less than the elixir of life, the essence of life and its cradle - a bounty that is bestowed from the heavens, which Allah has accredited to Himself.

Allah says in the Holy Quran, "And We sent water from the heavens so that We may enliven the dead earth and satiate its inhabitants (animals and men)" (Surah Al-Furqaan: 48-49)

Quenching the thirst of any person, and as the tradition above indicates, even that of animals is an extremely noble deed. In fact this action is no less than giving life to a dead person.

The words Saqqae or Saqaayat, which essentially mean quenching or satiating the thirst, have a special significance from the aspects of place and time.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) narrates, "One who satisfies the thirst of a person at a place where water is available; it is as if he has freed a slave. And one who does the same at a place where water is not available; it is as if he has enlivened a soul. And one who gives life to one soul; it is as if he has enlivened humanity."

(Makaremul Akhlaq pg. 85, Chap. 7, part. I)

All men, by virtue of being the creations of Allah enjoy equal rank and status before Him. Nevertheless some due to their characteristics and exceptional qualities enjoy preference over others. And even in this august group of the virtuous and the brilliant, there are some who outshine others on account of their excellence, which is unmatched and finds no parallel.

When the act of satiating a person is akin to giving life, the more exalted, lofty and illustrious the thirsty, that much more admirable is the position of the one who quenches his thirst. Indeed, it is the undeniable truth of this statement through which we can estimate the elevated position of the saqaayat of Hazrat Abbas Ibne Ali (a.s.).

Amongst the celebrated titles of Qamar-e-Bani Hashim Abul Fazl Abbas (a.s.) was the title of Saqqa (one who quenches the thirst) and in this aspect, he crossed the highest pinnacle of the peak of saqqayat. To gauge the extent of this attribute, one must go back in time and pay

attention to the historical significance of saqqayat, to see that prior to him how far back in history did this concept exist, and amongst the Arabs to which family was this noble act attributed. However before we do that, we must take a glimpse of the landscape of Arab culture.

Quenching the thirst is no mean task. More so in the land of Hejaz, shouldering the mantle of a Saqee is neither a task which can be fulfilled by all nor can any ordinary person bear the immense responsibility that comes along with it. This is because on one hand the vast expanse of Arabia, despite its size, is devoid of the priceless treasure of water.

On the other hand, the extreme heat and oppressive climatic conditions have reduced it to sandy desert. It is for these reasons that Arab villages and civilizations developed around water sources - for as soon as an Arab came across an oasis or a source of water, he would gather his tribe around it and it would become their home.

Needless to say, if a tribe or family lived away from a water source, it would have to confront immense difficulties and challenges. Its people would require traveling long distances to fill their water skins.

At that point in time, by undertaking this praiseworthy task, the youth would serve the elders of the community and satiate the thirst of the people. Over a period of time, those who performed this act commanded tremendous respect in the eyes of the people and community at large. The individual who achieved more success in this duty was more often than not elevated to the status of the leader of the tribe and it's principal.

The family of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was always at the forefront to support and encourage efforts of social benefit. Even in this, we find that the names of the tribe of Quraysh and amongst them the name of Janab Qusayy from the Bani Hashim at the helm of the list of those who quenched the thirst of the people.

His efforts in this regard were legendary and unmatched amongst the Quraysh and Bani Hashim. In those days, he was known to source water from the outskirts of Mecca and serve sweet refreshing drinks to the pilgrims (Hajis) of Mecca. Even on other days, the residents of Mecca would experience an acute shortage of water.

The thought that the residents of Mecca had to travel outside the city to fetch water was intolerable for him and pushed him to organize the digging of a well at a place called Majhool - this place later became the house of Janab Umme Hani (the respected sister of Ameerul Momeneen Ali (a.s.)). This was the first well for drinking water in Mecca and it became a place, which benefited all from wide and far.

This was followed by another well called Sijlah for the exclusive benefit of the pilgrims of the

Kaaba and to alleviate any difficulties that they may face. After him, Janabe Hashim took on this important responsibility. In the Hajj season, he constructed a leather pool near the spring of Zamzam so that the Hajis could partake of it with ease. He also commissioned a well, which he called Bazzar, and announced that it would be open for all people and none would have the right to debar another from taking water from it. He was followed by Janabe Abdul Muttalib (a.s.), who not only continued the good work established by his forefathers but also took it to a new level by establishing a place for Zamzam. This prospered and led to more tribes partaking of its benefit. A new standard was set in saqqayat for, now, not only were the pilgrims satiated with sweet refreshments, but were also served a drink of milk and honey in leather tumblers. Janabe Abu Taalib (a.s.) was the next in line to take on this honorable responsibility. He fulfilled his duty in such a brilliant fashion that he came to be remembered as Saaqiyul Hujaj (Seeratul Zainivol. 11 pg.26). He lined all roads to Mecca with kiosks, which served water to the pilgrims. History informs us that Abu Taalib (a.s.) was generally not known to be a wealthy individual. However he continued the rich tradition of his forefathers even at the cost of incurring a personal debt. The stigma of debt, the scarcity of food at his home was acceptable to him – but the thought of failing in his duty of providing water to the pilgrims who came from far and wide in the punishing Arabian summers and those who were guests at the House of Allah was unacceptable to him. He had no objective, no purpose save that of enlivening and rejuvenating the pilgrims with his efforts. After him, the mantle of saqqayat passed on to the shoulders of the master of this universe, Ameerul Momeneen Hazrat Ali (a.s.). The pages of history are resplendent with those incidents in which he not only exhibited, but also set new standards for saqqayat. These incidents are not far and few. Rather on innumerable occasions, Hazrat Ali (a.s.) personified the very concept of saqqayat. Turning back in time to the battle of Badr, we read how Ali (a.s.) displayed tremendous courage to lower himself in the well in the darkness of night to present water to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). Or during the events leading of the siege at the house of the caliph, when the caliph was begging for water, Hazrat Ali (a.s.) was the one who made arrangements for water to be sent to the caliph. Unlike others, he (a.s.) did not deem it fit to deny water even to the one who had usurped his position. He recognized that the role of the saaqee is to give life and not seize it. We also recollect the number of times in the battle of Siffeen when he re-captured the river from the hands of the

army of Muawiya and yet granted them access to as much water as they wanted. While on one hand, he had to take the enemy to task for his excesses, on the other hand he very well knew and appreciated the responsibility of Saaqee i.e. to offer water to anyone who wished to have it. As a veteran and seasoned Saaqee, he could hardly turn his back on this important duty of the Saaqee.

The types of Saqqayat

Our scholars have reported two levels of saqqayat. Generally, saqqayat is divided into two types - at times of peace and during war.

At times of peace, two levels of saqqayat are possible - one is from the aspect of business (commercial benefit) and the other is to satiate the thirst of a thirsty person for the sake of obtaining the pleasure and satisfaction of Allah.

The conditions of war also bring up two levels of saqqayat - one which is recommended and the other which is obligatory. The recommended saqqayat is at that moment in the heat of war, when water is available and your opponent does not really require water to continue his battle. The obligatory saqqayat is when thirst overpowers your opponent and if he reaches this condition that if he is not given water at that time, he would die of thirst.

In the family of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), examples of all types of saqqayat are found save the one, which is done for commercial benefit. The tradition initiated by Janab Qusayy continued through the ages in various stages till it reached the personality of Hazrat Abul Fazl Abbas (a.s.). And he fulfilled the responsibility in such a glorious fashion that till today the word "Saqqaa" is synonymous with his persona.

At this juncture, we present the words of Allamah Zeeshan Haider Jawadi who in his inimitable style brings forth the influence of the saqqayat of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) till Hazrat Abbas (a.s.) He writes, "It is astonishing that Hazrat Ameerul Momeneen Ali (a.s.) is titled Saaqee which is not the superlative degree in Arabic language. However the word Saqqaa is, and that is the title by which Hazrat Abbas (a.s.) is remembered."

He continues,

"Perhaps this aspect draws our attention to the fact that the significance of any action lies in the level of difficulty encountered in its performance. The namaz offered in peaceful environs is under no circumstances comparable to the namaz offered when barrages of arrows are directed towards the offerer and when the overall environment is fraught with danger. There is no doubt that Hazrat Ali (a.s.) scaled the highest levels of saqqayat, but more often

than not we see that ownership of the ultimate title is subject to the circumstances under which the deed is performed. The infallible Imams (a.s.), despite the embodiment of all glory and magnificence became famous by titles with singular characteristics. Some were known for their courage, others for their patience, their worship and their generosity. This is true for saqqayat also.

No doubt, Hazrat Ali (a.s.) is the saqee in this world and in the hereafter, but history guides us to the point that in scaling the heights of saqqayat, he (a.s.) did not encounter the difficulties and insurmountable challenges which confronted the "Saqqaa". In the battle of Badr, he did fetch water from the well, but he did not have to initiate the digging of the well. In the incident concerning Usman, he organised the water, but did not have to reach it himself. The battle of Siffeen did witness the magnanimity of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) - he granted access to the water to his enemies after capturing it, but did not go to the river himself.

But for Abul Fazl Abbas (a.s.), all these challenges presented themselves in a single event. He not only had to dig numerous well at Karbala, but also had to protect the water from the malevolence of his enemies. Establishing his control over the river too was no mean feat on that day – especially under circumstances when he was helplessly unarmed.

We must turn our attention to another delicate aspect - whenever Hazrat Ali (a.s.) initiated his efforts in this direction, he was able to take it to its logical conclusion. At Badr, the army was satiated as also in Siffeen. He was also, through various channels, able to reach water to the house of Usman. In the presence of his sons and closest companions, he offered milk to his own killer.

But alas, the intense desire of Hazrat Abul Fazl Abbas (a.s.) to accomplish his duty could not be fulfilled; his heart was forever immersed in regret for wells were dug, but were devoid of water; he went to the Furaat, but was prevented by his enemies to return; the water bag was filled with water, but ultimately it did not reach the children of Imam Husain (a.s.) who were desirous of its contents.

Under these circumstances, it would be a great injustice to his personality if history did not remember him as Saqqaa. Perhaps it is for this reason that Hazrat Abbas (a.s.) accepted the responsibility-laden mantle of saqqayat and went about his task in such a splendid fashion that till today, he is remembered as Saqqaa.

And what a lofty standard he set when not only was every member of the army of Hur satiated completely, but even the animals in that battalion were relieved of their thirst. None remained thirsty on that day - friend or foe, Hazrat Abbas (a.s.), ensured that their thirst was quenched. By this action, he enlivened the glorious tradition of his forefathers, enhanced what he inherited

from them and perfected Saqqayat forever.

.(Excerpts from Qamar-e- Bani Hashim, The Life of Abul Fad Abbas, The Leader of Karbala