

## **Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - The Caliphate Issue**

### ***Nature of the issue***

In our study of the issue of the caliphate, we have to consider the question of the nature of the issue. That question to be considered is whether the election of the Caliph is a religious or a political issue. The commandments of religion are contained in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. There is no mention about the Caliph in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. In the Holy Quran the word "Caliph" has been used with reference to Man in general when he is said to be the Caliph of God. This means that the people in general are the Caliph of God. The Caliph to be the Head of the State is a political functionary only. Political issues must necessarily be limited to the milieu in which they arise, and political issues cannot be kept alive for indefinite period. In Islam the State and the Church are not separate. This merely means that in an Islamic State the political affairs would be administered in accordance with the injunctions of Islam. It does not mean that every political issue would become a religious issue. A religious issue must be directly based on the Quran and the Sunnah, and any political issue cannot become part of religion. Election of a functionary is for a limited period, and when that period is over all disputes about the election come to an end. Even if it is conceded that Ali should have succeeded the Holy Prophet in preference to any other person, the controversy should have ceased with the close of the rule of the rightly guided Caliphs. To keep this political issue alive for all times and make it a ground for sectarian differences does not appear to be in accord with the spirit of Islam. Even if Ali did not get the caliphate, he did get the caliphate after all, and with his assumption of the caliphate, the controversy about the validity or otherwise about the election of the previous Caliphs should have come to an end being time barred.

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