

Iqbal Day: Mission Statement

Riffat Hassan

Allama Iqbal is the spiritual and intellectual founder of Pakistan. Poet, philosopher, educationist, lawyer, political activist, social reformer, he is unmatched in his versatility and breadth of knowledge and vision. His message is more relevant and important to contemporary Muslims than that of any other Muslim thinker of the past or present. This is because he faced the challenges of both traditionalism and modernity fearlessly by building his philosophy on the integrated vision of the Qur'an.

Iqbal's philosophy is unique in that it offers concrete guidance on how a Muslim can attain "the good life" which is the goal set before humanity created by God "in the best of moulds" (Surah 95 : 4). The opening line of Iqbal's Preface to his Lectures on *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* points out "The Qur'an is a book which emphasizes 'deed' rather than 'idea.'" Likewise, Iqbal's philosophy, rich as it is in ideas and concepts, is fundamentally action-oriented.

Iqbal's dream was for Muslims of India to have a state in which they could preserve "the culture of Islam inspired by a specific ethical ideal." It is important to note here that to Iqbal "the culture of Islam" was not the cultural practices of Muslims. To him it was an ideal value-system, "a system of life and conduct," which was based upon the ethical principles of normative Islam.

In his memorable presidential address to the All-India Muslim League at Allahabad in 1930, Iqbal pointed out that Islam was "an ethical ideal plus a certain kind of polity," and said, "I would like to see Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sindh and Balochistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British Empire or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of Muslims, at least of North-West India."

Here it is useful to note that the failed rebellion of 1857 had made Muslims the particular target of the wrath of the British rulers who instituted open discriminatory policies against them. This resulted in Muslim fortunes reaching their lowest ebb in the 1860s and 1870s. The disturbing events of 1857-58 were a turning point not only in the thought and life of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who founded the 'Aligarh Movement, but also of many other Indian Muslims who became wary of associating Islam with politics and limited it to personal piety and righteous behaviour. Iqbal was deeply concerned about this state of affairs and considered it extremely important to demonstrate to his fellow Muslims that Islam could not be limited in such a way, and that its religious and ethical teachings necessitated the emergence of a social and political order based upon them. Ironically, if Iqbal were alive today his challenge would have been to persuade Pakistanis that Islam

cannot be limited to politics which is disconnected from the religious and ethical principles of their faith.

Iqbal was a visionary philosopher who became involved in politics because he believed that “Politics have their roots in the spiritual life of man ... It is because present-day political ideals as they appear to be shaping themselves in India, may affect its original structure and character that I find myself interested in politics.”

Iqbal’s dream of Pakistan was of a Muslim state in which there would be an integral relationship between the religious and ethical foundational principles of Islam and a political system derived from them.

Concluding his presidential address at Allahabad, Iqbal said, “One lesson I have learnt from history of Muslims. In critical times in their history it is Islam that has saved Muslims and not vice-versa. If today you focus your vision on Islam and seek inspiration from the ever-vitalizing idea embodied in it, you will be only reassembling your scattered forces, regaining your lost integrity, and thereby saving yourself from total destruction.”

Iqbal’s words spoken in 1930 are profoundly relevant to contemporary Pakistanis who refer to Pakistan as Iqbal’s “dream.” The first step toward actualizing this “dream” is to understand Iqbal’s vision of Islam which gave birth to his ideal.

Iqbal’s message to us today would be the same as the one he delivered to the Allahabad assembly. The only way that Iqbal’s dream can be made a reality is by striving to live up to the highest ethical ideals and the best ethical practices of Islam.

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