

Understanding Iqbal's "dream" of Pakistan

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Allama Muhammad Iqbal is the spiritual and intellectual founder of Pakistan. No poet or philosopher in the history of the world has inspired and energized millions of people as Iqbal did. He was the last and greatest thinker of the historic 'Aligarh Movement which brought about a paradigm shift in the consciousness of the Muslims of India, and transformed their destiny. But Iqbal's place in history is not limited to his role as a modernist, reformist Muslim thinker in India. He is the most outstanding poet-philosopher of the world of Islam, and of the world in general, since the death of Jalaluddin Rumi in 1273.

Poet, philosopher, educationist, lawyer, political activist, social reformer, Iqbal is unmatched in his versatility and the breadth of his knowledge and vision. His message is more relevant and important to contemporary Muslims than the message of any other Muslim thinker of the past or present. This is due not only to the fact that Iqbal faced the challenges of both traditionalism and modernity fearlessly, but also - and more importantly - because he had a profound understanding of the integrated vision of the Qur'an which he made the basis of his philosophy.

What is unique about Iqbal's philosophy is that it offers concrete guidance about how a Muslim can attain "the good life" which is the goal set before humanity whom God has created "in the best of moulds" (Surah 95: *At-Tin*: 4). The opening line of Iqbal's Preface to his famous Lectures on *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* points out that "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.

It is often proclaimed by Pakistanis that Pakistan was Iqbal's "dream" but few know that this "dream" was the outcome of a lifetime of deep thinking and feeling, of study, of creativity, and of prayer. Iqbal died in 1938, nine years before the creation of Pakistan, but his role in the Pakistan Movement was so pivotal that it is not an exaggeration to say that if there had been no Iqbal, there might well have been no Pakistan.

The influence that Iqbal wielded was phenomenal. His personal reputation - not only as an outstanding poet and philosopher - but also as a person of unswerving conviction and incorruptible honesty, had contributed greatly to the rallying of Muslims under the banner upheld by the Quaid-e-'Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. All these facts notwithstanding, it must be kept in mind that Iqbal was a visionary philosopher and not a politician. Politics constitutes the primary interest of many politicians who are often driven by motives of political expediency. However, Iqbal's interest in politics was secondary, not primary. He explained his reasons for becoming involved in politics, in his Presidential Address delivered at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim Conference at Lahore in 1932: "Politics have their roots in the spiritual life of man. It is my belief that Islam is not a matter of private opinion. It is a society, or if you like, a civic Church. 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" was that the Muslims of India 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 at the All-India Muslim League at Allahabad in 1930, Iqbal reiterated that Islam was "an ethical ideal plus a certain kind of polity," and said, "I would like to see the Punjab, 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 the Muslims, at least of North West India."

Deeply conscious of the multi-faceted challenges and difficulties with which Indian Muslims were faced at that time, Iqbal pointed out in the Allahabad Address, "Never in our history has Islam had to stand a greater trial than the one which confronts it today." However, his faith in the efficacy of his faith remained steadfast amid this grim realization and he affirmed that he was "a man who is not despaired of Islam as a living force...who believes that religion is a power of the utmost importance in

the life of individuals as well as States, and finally who believes that Islam is itself Destiny and will not suffer a destiny.”

Refuting the idea that religion is “a private affair” of an individual, Iqbal went on to put some rhetorical questions to the Muslim Assembly that he was addressing: “Would you like to see Islam, as a moral and political ideal, meeting the same fate in the world of Islam as Christianity has already met in Europe? Is it possible to retain Islam as an ethical ideal and to reject it as a polity in favour of national polities, in which religious attitude is not permitted to play any part?”

Iqbal believed that in Islam it was not possible to bifurcate ethics and politics and he contrasted the separation of the spiritual and the temporal that he saw in Christianity with “the nature of the Prophet’s religious experience, as disclosed in the Qur’an.” Referring to this experience, Iqbal said that it was “creative of a social order. Its immediate outcome is the fundamentals of a polity with implicit legal concepts whose civic significance cannot be belittled merely because their origin is revelational. The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order which it has created. The rejection of the one will eventually involve the rejection of the other. Therefore, the construction of a polity on national lines, if it means a displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity, is simply unthinkable to a Muslim.”

Here it is useful to note that the failed rebellion of 1857 had made the Muslims the particular target of the wrath of the British rulers who instituted openly 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 Sayyid Ahmad Khan who founded the ‘Aligarh Movement, but also of many other Muslims who became wary of associating Islam with politics and limited it to a practice of 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 which was based upon them. Ironically, if Iqbal was alive today his challenge would be to persuade many Pakistanis that Islam cannot be

limited to politics which is disconnected from the religious and ethical principles of their faith.

In the light of Iqbal's views stated in the above-quoted passages, it is clear that his "dream" of Pakistan was of a Muslim State in which there would be an integral or organic relationship between the religious and ethical foundational principles of Islam and the political system which derived from them. If the latter was not an outcome of the former, it would lead to unbridled injustice and brutal oppression, as Iqbal pointed out in his well-known lines from *Bal-e-Jibrit*: "Whether it is the pomp of monarchy or democracy's show, if religion is separated from politics, what results is the tyranny of Changez."

Concluding his Presidential Address at the All-India Muslim League Annual Session at Allahabad, Iqbal said, "One lesson I have learnt from the 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 this "dream." His 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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