

Allama Iqbal's Vision of Pakistan and its Relevance Today

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It is important to remember that Pakistan is a unique country - the only Muslim country in the world which came into existence in the name of Islam.

In today's world where "Islam" has become associated in many minds with fanaticism and other forms of extremism, which lead to acts of terror, it is also important to remember what "Islam" meant to the visionary who is considered the "spiritual" founder of Pakistan - Allama Iqbal.

To Iqbal, Islam - self-surrender to God - implied that Muslims would not surrender their freedom to anything except God. In his view, a large part of the Qur'an's concern is to free human beings from the chains that bind them: traditionalism, authoritarianism (religious, political, economic), tribalism, racism, classism or caste system, and slavery. This concern is reflected in much of Iqbal's writing. He believed passionately in freedom which he considered to be "the very breath of vital living," and pointed out:

In servitude, life is reduced to a small rivulet,
but free, it is a boundless ocean!

(*Bang-e-Dara*, p. 287)

Allama Iqbal was a visionary whose words and work changed the destiny of the Muslims of India. When in 1895, at the age of 18, he came from Sialkot to Lahore to study at the Government College, he began to participate in the annual *musha'iras* of the *Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam*. Even at the beginning of his long and fruitful poetic career, he possessed a genius for being able to feel the pulse of the nation. In 1900, he recited a poem entitled "*Nala'-e-Yatim*" at the *Anjuman musha'ira* which had a remarkable response because it struck a chord of emotional cognizance of deep-rooted psychological

needs of those who came to listen to it. The "Orphan's Lament" was also the lament of the Indian Muslims who felt desolate and abandoned in an atmosphere of political bondage and spiritual poverty.

The challenge before the young poet was: how were Indian Muslims to be liberated from the bondage of British imperialism, Hindu domination, and - most serious of all - their inner weaknesses? These weaknesses stemmed from many causes including political powerlessness, economic disadvantage, social stagnation, and educational backwardness. By the time Iqbal's first major work *Asrar-e-Khudi* was published in 1915, he had evolved his philosophy of "Khudi" (Selfhood), as a response to this challenge. He had come to believe that the purpose of life was the development of the Self, which could be strengthened or weakened through the inculcation of what he considered to be positive and negative attributes. Of central significance amongst the former were respect for humanity, commitment to justice, and steadfastness in "promoting the good, and prohibiting the evil."

Iqbal had become convinced that the Muslim community in India had been able to survive only through the preservation of "the culture of Islam." In this context he had said:

It cannot be denied that Islam, regarded as an ethical ideal plus a certain kind of polity - by which expression I mean a social structure regulated by a legal system and animated by a specific ethical ideal - has been the chief formative factor in the life history of the Muslims of India. It has furnished those basic emotions and loyalties which gradually unify scattered individuals and groups and finally transform them into a well-defined people. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that India is perhaps the only country in the world where Islam as a society is almost entirely due to the working of Islam as a culture inspired by a specific ethical ideal.

(S. A. Vahid, Editor, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, Lahore, 1964, p. 162)

Here, it needs to be pointed out that “the culture of Islam” to which Iqbal has referred many times in his writings, is not the same as the cultural practices of Muslims. It is an embodiment of the normative values and world-view of Islam which were enshrined in the teachings of the Qur’an and enacted in the life of the Prophet of Islam (pbuh).

Iqbal believed that “Muslim society with its remarkable homogeneity and inner unity, has grown to be what it is under the pressure of the laws and institutions associated with the culture of Islam.” He also believed that in order to become “a living member of the Muslim community” (a person) “must thoroughly assimilate the culture of Islam.” The object of the assimilation is to create a uniform mental outlook, a peculiar way of looking at the world, a certain standpoint from where to judge the value of things, which sharply defines our community, and transforms it into a corporate individual giving it a definite purpose and ideal of its own. In the Presidential Address, which Iqbal delivered to the All-India Muslim League in 1930, he had mentioned the Muslim demand “for the creation of a Muslim India within India,” adding “...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.” (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 171)

Thus, Iqbal foreshadowed the creation of Pakistan though he did not live long enough to see its birth. What would Pakistan have meant to Iqbal had he been alive in 1947? He would have seen it as a successful culmination of the historic struggle spearheaded by the ‘Aligarh movement to preserve the rights of Indian Muslims as a “nation.” But - more importantly - Iqbal would have seen Pakistan as a new beginning - as a model environment in which “the culture of Islam” would be safeguarded.

Poet, philosopher, educationist, lawyer, political activist, social reformer, Iqbal is considered by many to be the most outstanding Muslim thinker since Jalaluddin Rumi who died in 1273. However, while Iqbal is hailed as the “spiritual founder” of Pakistan, his dynamic message has been, deliberately and systematically, excluded from becoming a part of the intellectual and moral heritage of young

Pakistanis. The major reason for this - in my opinion - is that the morally-corrupt and spiritually-bankrupt rulers of the only country that was created in the name of Islam, cannot afford to have Iqbal's iconoclastic voice, which rejected every form of totalitarianism and injustice, allowed to shatter their crystal palaces.

Since the start of the colonial period, Muslims in general have experienced bondage of various kinds, ranging from political to economic to cultural to intellectual. In Pakistan where the majority of the population lives under feudalism, and which has been ruled by military dictators for most of its life, it is understandable why so many people feel shackled both internally and externally. This feeling is exacerbated by the daily drainage of their energy on procuring the basic necessities of life. In Pakistan today, for an increasing number of people the struggle for survival has become a full-time pre-occupation. Mobilizing these people who are beleaguered by so many difficulties to take part in a campaign for national liberation requires leaders with vision and courage who, while empathizing with them, make them believe that they have the ability to change their individual and collective destinies.

In his historic Presidential Address at the annual session of the All-India Muslim League, in 1930, at Allahabad, Iqbal had said:

Never in our history has Islam had to stand a greater trial than the one, which confronts it today (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 165) ...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. (*Ibid.*, p. 194)

The lawyers' movement for the independence of the judiciary and for the restoration of the Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, and his worthy colleagues, to their rightful positions, seems to me to be deeply-rooted in the categorical ethical imperatives of the Qur'an on which Iqbal built his philosophy. It is a movement for securing justice for those who have been grievously wronged, and for

establishing a system of justice, which unjust and unscrupulous rulers will not be able to manipulate, undermine or displace.

If Iqbal had been alive today he would have been very pleased to see this movement - the only one in Pakistan's troubled history that truly represents civil society - because he would have seen it as a movement to preserve "the culture of Islam." This movement was started by lawyers who have been at its forefront, at great cost to themselves. But it is now not confined to them. It is now the people's movement, which has given its strong support to the leaders who have stood up for the cause of justice - one of the most important ethical imperatives of the Qur'an - which every Muslim is commanded to uphold under any and all circumstances.

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