

# **Our Leaders and Iqbal's Pakistan**

## **Riffat Hassan**

Allama Iqbal's name was invoked many times in the dark and difficult days preceding the restoration of the Chief Justice of Pakistan and the pre-November 3, 2007 judiciary, after a breathtaking display of people's power on March 16, 2009. Why was this done? What did Allama Iqbal signify to the people of Pakistan as they faced increasing hardship with every passing day? What did Allama Iqbal have to do with the first, and so far only, movement in Pakistan's history that was value-focused, and aimed at attaining a just society?

The gallant and prolonged struggle of the lawyers who were gradually joined by other sectors of civil society and some political leaders and their party-workers, undoubtedly played a pivotal role in awakening the nation's spirit which had lain dormant for decades. It was this spirit that had made possible the creation of Pakistan in the face of formidable obstacles. But, unfortunately, instead of fortifying this spirit, most of Pakistan's leaders chose to stifle it through all kinds of oppressive and authoritarian machinations. It seemed as if they had succeeded because Pakistanis endured every kind of injustice and hardship without standing up for their rights. But the refusal of Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry to accept an unjust decree, and his willingness to endure the dire punishments that were inflicted on him and his family for many months, stirred the nation's passive spirit into action.

Pakistan has never known anyone like Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry nor anything like the lawyers' movement. It is a country that has been ruled through much of its history by military dictators who have not allowed the seeds of democracy to flourish. The feudal and tribal leaders who wield much authority in their respective areas have also been concerned with preserving their own privileged way of life rather than promoting an egalitarian culture. Other powerful interest-groups have pursued their own vested agendas. Having lost its founder so soon after its creation, Pakistan has long needed heroes who could be trusted to protect the rights of the common person and the nation's greatest good. It found what it needed in Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and the lawyers who risked their life as well as their livelihood so that justice and truth should come to prevail in Pakistan.

The resistance encountered by the movement for justice reached its climax when draconian measures were taken to virtually seal the country so that those participating in the long march could not reach Islamabad for their sit-in

before the Parliament building on March 16, 2009. The lawyers and political leaders who were in the forefront of this movement were prevented from traveling to Islamabad, placed under house-arrest or jailed, and other protestors were subjected to police brutality. A few leaders were able to elude captivity by going into hiding. Seeing the unfolding of this incredible drama, one felt as if one was watching the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil.

There was a time when one feared that the forces of evil - with all the state machinery at their disposal - would triumph. But then something happened that had never happened before in Pakistan's history. Mian Nawaz Sharif who had not gone into hiding and had been placed under house-arrest, announced that he was not going to obey illegal orders and would go on the long march. He started on his journey with a few vehicles and workers, but as soon as word got out that he was on the road, people started to appear from all directions to join his growing caravan. Lahore, the historic city, made history yet another time as Lahorites from all walks of life - men, women, children, young, middle-aged and old - joined Mian Nawaz Sharif in a march, not simply to Islamabad, but to a new Pakistan. Such was the strength, the passion, the energy of the multitude that was moving forward like a tsunami, that those who had tried everything under the sun to stop the long march, had to withdraw from the battle lines and accept the will of the people.

Allama Iqbal was not physically present when the nation was going through the throes of revolutionary social change in the last two years. But his vision and his voice became increasingly more important as the crisis deepened into a life-and-death struggle for the soul and survival of Pakistan. In almost every speech he made, Mian Shahbaz Sharif referred to "Iqbal's Pakistan" and "the Quaid - e -'Azam's Pakistan." Mian Nawaz Sharif often quoted Iqbal's verses in which he urged Muslims to remember the special dignity conferred on them by God and not to compromise their higher ideals for worldly gains. Imran Khan, also an ardent admirer of Iqbal, said that his manifesto was grounded in Iqbal's thought.

It is not at all surprising that when confronted with massive injustice and oppression which was holding the 170 million Pakistanis in economic, physical, psychological, social, and legal thrall, our best leaders would turn to Allama Iqbal for guidance and inspiration. The most outstanding Muslim thinker since the death of Jalaluddin Rumi in 1273, Iqbal had been, since his youth, deeply concerned about the liberation of Indian Muslims from various forms of bondage.

When he came as a young student to Lahore from Sialkot to study at Government College (1895), he became acutely aware of the plight of Indian Muslims who were confronted on the one side by the tyranny of British imperialism and colonialism, and, on the other side, by the hegemonic designs of the Hindu majority. Iqbal began to recite poems at the annual *musha'iras* of the *Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam*, in which he expressed the melancholy feelings of the Indian Muslims, but also urged them to develop their inner faith and strength so that they could "awaken the ones who sleep" and raise their voice to proclaim the truth.

Iqbal's three years' sojourn in the West (1905-1908) was a very productive period during which he obtained a degree from Cambridge University in England, a Ph. D from Munich University in Germany, and also became a Barrister-at-Law from Lincoln's Inn in London. During this time Iqbal had the opportunity to see the Western civilization from very close quarters and became aware of the negative aspects of prevalent ideologies such as nationalism, secularism, and materialism. In his search for a society which had the potential of being universal and actualizing the highest ethical values, Iqbal began to focus more and more on Islam.

From the time of his return from Europe to India (1908) to the time of his death (1938), Iqbal wrote all his major works in which he stated what he perceived to be the shortcomings of contemporary Muslims, and how these could be overcome by understanding the fundamental teachings of Islam and by implementing what he called "the culture of Islam." It is necessary to note here that to Iqbal "the culture of Islam" was not the cultural practices of Muslims, but the value-system – "a system of life and conduct" - which was based upon Islam's ethical principles.

With the insight and sensitivity of a poet, and the systematic thinking and logic of a philosopher, Iqbal outlined a programme of action for Muslims, with particular reference to the Muslims in India. The objective of this programme was the implementation of the Qur'anic imperative "*al-'amr bi'l-mar'uf wa nahi 'an al-munkar*" stated in a number of verses which commands Muslims to do what is right and to forbid what is wrong. Iqbal believed that it was necessary to identify and protest against those social factors and psychological attitudes that had kept Muslims in the grip of Fear, Despair and Grief which the Qur'an regarded as impediments to human development. Cleansing society of what was wrong was a part of doing what was right. Both the prohibiting of what was wrong ("*al-munkar*") and the doing of what was good ("*al-mar'uf*") was required in order the "reconstruct" Muslim societies according to the highest ideals or values of Islam.

The Qur'an had pointed out that Adam - humanity - had been appointed by God to be "*Khalifah tul 'ard*" (God's vicegerent on earth) and told "Unto God is your limit." Upon this Qur'anic envisioning of human destiny, Iqbal constructed his philosophy of "*Khudi*" (Selfhood) which has been a source of inspiration and energy to millions of Muslims from his own time to ours. He issued a call to the poor, the oppressed, the enslaved, to revolt against what was wrong, and to work with determination and diligence toward the highest level of personal and community development.

It was the spirit of Allama Iqbal which reverberated in the powerful words used by Mian Shahbaz Sharif and Mian Nawaz Sharif when they proclaimed that they were revolting - and asking others to revolt - against the wrongs being committed in Pakistan. Iqbal had issued a call to awaken "the poor people of his world" so that they could claim their rightful share in the fruits of their labour and in the God-given resources needed for human sustenance. His passionate messages were echoed by Mian Shahbaz Sharif and Mian Nawaz Sharif when they spoke of the plight of the disenfranchised and deprived masses and pledged to work for their rights even at the cost of their lives.

Iqbal had stated once, "Nations are born in the hearts of poets, they prosper and die in the hands of politicians." Most of Pakistan's politicians have betrayed the nation that was born in Iqbal's heart by separating politics from ethics. The challenge before Mian Nawaz Sharif, Mian Shahbaz Sharif, and Imran Khan - and other leaders - who are aware of Iqbal's pivotal role in liberating Muslim masses from internal and external shackles - is to remember that when "Politics is separated from ethical principles, it degenerates into Changezi." To make "Iqbal's Pakistan" a reality, it is necessary to "reconstruct" today's Pakistan in the light of the justice-and-compassion-centred vision of the Qur'an which Allama Iqbal made the basis of his philosophy.

"Our Leaders and Iqbal's Pakistan," in *The Nation*, Lahore, Pakistan, April 20, 2009