

ALLAMAH IQBAL: A BEACON OF LIGHT FOR MUSLIMS IN THE PRESENT DAY WORLD

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Introduction

Allamah Iqbal was a man of all pervasive ability and potentials. He covered such a wide field of intellectual sphere that it has been impossible to describe him. His most important attribute was that he used all his abilities, art, literature and thinking in the service of mankind and did not like 'art for art's sake'. The source of his knowledge was equally vast but, by far and large, it was based on the Holy Qur'an and Islamic values. For example, unlike Sufism he has explained, at great length, that the apex of human attainment was not merging with God but submitting oneself to His Will and service in the wider sense. The central and most important pillar of the edifice of his works was the concept of *Khudā* (Self-Cognisance) and its use for development of personality. His works, both poetic and prose, are replete with material on this subject. He can be best described as the embodiment of "Being a beacon of light in the dark night of the wilderness", which is what is most needed by the Muslim Ummah.

Recently I had the good fortune of reading a book named *QirÇ«s-i-Iqbal* by Professor Muhammad Munawwar published by the Iqbal Academy Pakistan. This book has very useful papers on the genius of Allamah Iqbal. However, the one entitled "*Khud« Kariü Tujbü Tüaray Muq«m Sü jg«b*" (May God make you cognizant of your status) appealed to me most. In my ardent desire to bring its contents to the attention of the admirers of Allamah Iqbal who do not know Urdu, I have ventured to present its English translation in this paper. The paper brings out the important need for developing *Khudā* by Muslims to be able to face the present day world and to fight all the powers of evil and those of the rebels against God so as to win for themselves the place of honour which they deserve and to discharge honourably the mission entrusted to them by God in the Holy Qur'an. In addition to the program presented in the paper, I wish to add the following four verses of Iqbal as a preparation for the struggle ahead:

*The heart which is restless for death in defence of Truth
First life in his own earthly body should create*

Should burn down this borrowed universe

And from the ashes his own universe should create

*Should demonstrate the potential power of life
So that this spark may the eternal light create*

This is the hour of judgment, you in the judgment field are

O negligent one present action if some in your treasure are

(Bang-i-Dar: “Khizr-i-Rah”)

Translation

“Khudā Karū Tujbū Tūray Muqam Sū jgāb”

(May God make you cognizant of your status)

Hazrat Allamah Iqbal has stated in *Asr-i-Khudi* that a young man from the region of Merve presented himself to Data Ganj Bakhsh, ‘Alā Hujvârâ and complained that he had become encircled by strong enemies, living among whom was impossible.. He pleaded for a way out of his predicament. ‘Alā Hujvârâ in reply addressed him thus, “O young man! you are unaware of your potential. Why are you afflicted by the fear of others. You are a great; though dormant power. You should wake up and realize that your fear is your own creation. If a piece of stone considers itself to be one of glasses it is prone to breaking to pieces. You should realize that a strong enemy is a special favour of God. The hustle and bustle in your life results from your enemy

*I am sincerely telling you that your enemy is also your friend
His existence is really the source of splendour of your life
Whoever is cognizant of the status of Khudi*

Considers the strong enemy as God's blessing

Asrār-i-Khudâ, Section XI, The Story of a young man from Merve who Presented himself before Syed Makhdoom 'Alâ Hujvârâ (May God Have Mercy on him) and complained of oppression by his foes)

A strong enemy is a grace from God because through him the dormant potentials of man are awakened and his concealed possibilities acquire the blessing of life as if the crop of his life has been blessed by rain.

*For the crop of human effort the enemy is like a cloud
It wakes up his potentials from dormancy*

(*Asrār-i-Khudâ*, op. cit.)

Man is the treasure-house of potentials that, however, are shrouded in thick layers of indifference. When the moment of confrontation and conflict arrives, it appears as if all the dormant potentials wake up into activity.. In this way the battlefield becomes an instrument of bringing human possibilities to fruition. Challenge alone confers strength on individuals as well as nations!

In 1951, a dinner party was held at the house of the late Allamah 'Alk al-Dân Âiddâqâ in honour of Kh«n Ghul«m Sarwar Kh«n Gàya, Professor of Persian Literature at Kabul University. Many distinguished scholars of literature were present, including two students, viz. MuÁammad Khurshâd 'ÿÄim, from the Cadet College, Hasan Abdal and my humble self. Following the trend of the conversation, the late Dr. Niy«z AÁmad, Director of the Department of Chemical Technology, University of Punjab stated that one evening, he was present in the audience of Allamah Iqbal. The subject of conversation was that every trial and tribulation was a blessing and favour from God. The test may be academic, ethical, physical, spiritual, financial or anything else, it is a blessing from God.. When the child passes the examination of grade five, he realizes that he has reached grade six. In the same way when he goes through several kinds of tests and not succumbing to those tests gradually succeeds in passing them it increases his /her self confidence and his personality and self gradually attain stability. At this stage he realizes that such and such incident was a very dreadful challenge, but by facing that it turned out that he had the ability to conquer it completely.

There is no way to attain this self-confident without a challenge. Man subdues greed, continuously breaks open the knots of avarice. The opportunities leading to arrogance are very severe tests. It is a great victory to make humility victorious over arrogance. He attains a victory, which confers stability on his personality for achieving his goal.

Dr. Niyaz Ahmad said, "Very respectfully I interrupted Hazrat Allamah Iqbal's talk and enquired whether the devil also was a continuous test. He (Allamah Iqbal) replied in the affirmative. I submitted that by virtue of attaining success in this continuous test do the people of faith get the realization of increased self-confidence in their own thought. Hazrat Allamah again replied in the affirmative. "Gathering more courage, I again submitted that it means that the devil is also really a concealed benevolence of God. Hazrat Allamah smiled and agreed with me, but cautioned me against telling this to any maulvi."

Challenge becomes serious only when the adversary is much above the self in strength, ability, intelligence, enlightenment, eloquence and comprehension. If it is intended to overpower him or at least attain equality with him it would be necessary to raise one's status by hard work and diligence. If one does not find anybody better than himself in his environment it perpetrates the condition of complacency, and no need is felt for awakening one's intellectual, spiritual potential and mental and physical abilities. If a wrestler stays in the company of his own pupils and does not have to face any challenge from his superiors this leads to a halt in the skill of his wrestling, which then leads him to his downfall. If there is encounter with people and organizations superior to one self in knowledge, thought, intellect, spiritualism, the potentials of individuals and organizations start to gain strength. A famous writer, philosopher, poet, and scientist, Al-Jahiz had designated teachers as dull. He used to say that so and so son of so and so is stupid like teachers. It is quite possible for Al-Jahiz to be right. One reason for this is quite plain in that the teacher, who has to say what he wants to say, has to get his thought accepted and the people with whom he has to deal are students with immature mind the superiority of the teacher is accepted and confirmed. This results in impediment of the intellectual progress of the teacher himself. If he had to contend with some scholar better and higher than himself he would have continued progress of his intellectual potential.

Being deprived of a better adversary is, in a way, a great misfortune. Iqbal says:

*The challenge loving temperament is not agreeable to be in
The garden where the hunter does not lie in ambush*

(B«l-i-Jibrâl, Poem 4)

The longing for progress is created only in the company of superior companions. However, in some walks of life the friendship of a superior friend operates as a protective umbrella. His help creates the condition of complacency. In these conditions feelings of self-respect, self-cognisance and sense of honour is not encouraged and the dormant potentials are not able to appear. On the contrary dealing with an enemy, especially stronger and better one, creates conditions of conflict. In the field of life and particularly in the battle of life, the character of steel is created only in the event of continued struggle. Invitation for a fight, challenge and their counter-challenge, to defeat the better one with a firm determination drags one into battle with the opponent. So individuals as well as societies need adversaries superior to them. When nations are faced with danger to their survival, the virtues of concordance, sympathy, sacrifice and brotherhood spring up in them. Finland is a small country but we remember that in November 1939 they brought Russia to its knees. In the end it was only through the help of Germans that Russia could conquer the Finns. In spite of all this, Russia could not subdue the Finns easily, like Hungary. And recently, the sense of honour of the Afghans has presented the scenes, which would enlighten the hearts of people of honour till eternity. They would teach lesson of courage to weak nations and the strong ones will think before jumping over the weak ones to annihilate them.

We need help of friends and we are thankful to them for that help. However, only enemies provide the whip to our sense of self-respect. The end of the weak at the hands of the strong is obvious. Weakness, in a way, is an invitation to the strong for oppression, at his will. Hazrat Allamah presents the following example for bringing this home to his readers:

*A drop of dew on the tip of a rose branch
Was shining like the tear in a nightingale's eye*

Distressed by the heat a bird arrived under the rose branch

The dewdrop trickled into its mouth

As the bird, as if fainting with thirst

It sustained its life by taking some one else's life

*Do not neglect preservation of your Khudâ even for a moment
Become a crystal of diamond and not a drop of dew*

(*Asrar-i-Khudâ*: Section X11- Story of a Bird that was Restlessly Faint with Thirst)

What Hazrat Allamah wants to convey to his readers is that those who cannot defend themselves become easy prey to the greed of others. Surely, the drop of dew easily went down the bird's throat, but the bird would not have pecked if it was a piece of diamond instead of a shining drop.. If it had done so it would have hurt its beak and if the speck of diamond had gone down its throat it would have wounded the same.

A drop of water may or may not become a diamond, but a whole panorama of destinies unfolds itself to the human race. Should we live in strength or weakness, with honour or dishonour? This world will house the jackal as well as the lion, the cat as well as the fox, the pigeon as well as the falcon, the owl as well as the vulture. The question is that out of these different destinies which one would some individual or society select. Here have to live the ruler as well as the ruled, independent nations as well as dependent ones, the weak as well as the strong. The important thing to know is as to who selects what. Does he like to be a pigeon or a falcon? Obviously, in the works of Hazrat Allamah, the pigeon is the emblem of delicacy, subtlety and weakness, whereas the falcon is that of fast flight and magnanimity. When Hazrat Allamah talks about the blood of pigeon he does not refer to society's love for blood shedding and oppression, as is expressed by some learned critics. Hazrat Allamah is really teaching the lesson of self respect. What is meant is that becoming delicate, refined and gentle will lead you to be a battleground for the display of strength for the strong. The life and existence of the weak is no more than a sport for the strong. Once an enlightened young man asked me with reference to a veteran poet critic as to

why Hazrat Allamah hated the pigeon, which had done him no harm? How could I tell the young man that instead of hating pigeons how much Hazrat Allamah loved them? He had pigeons as pets and used to fly them for sport for a long time. All 1 said was that the poet critic with reference to whom he was talking should know as to what Hazrat Allamah meant by using the word “pigeon.” If Hazrat Allamah had hated the pigeon he would not have said:

*Start singing O nightingale so that by your music
The falcon's heart may be created in the delicate body of the pigeon*
(*B«ng-i-Dar«: Poem “ñulë‘-i-Isk«m”*)

Now, I humbly request the poets, preachers, imams, religious scholars and politicians to light up torches of determination and courage in the breasts of their slave nation, so that it may fight the war of independence like heroes and may be able to enjoy the pleasures of life in the environment of freedom.. The same subject has been mentioned in the following verse:

*Create burning courage in slaves with the pathos of Faith
Put the resourceless sparrow in contest with the falcon*

(*B«l-i-Jibrâl: “Farm«n-i-Khud« Farishton kü N«m”*)

Obviously, if lack of material resources is meant, the bird cannot change its status. It is bird and will continue to be so. However, in the works of Allamah sparrow, “the helpless, powerless, weak sparrow” represents people of the Muslim nation who are victims of oppression and cruelty. The object is to make these weak and powerless people cognizant of their self-respect and to awaken their consciousness of the value of self so as to make them self-cognizant.

Some of our friends think that before the partition of the sub-continent our youth were relatively more industrious, our religious scholars were relatively more religious, our wise men were more nationalistic and so on, all on account of suppression. They explain this state of affairs by the fact that at that time we were face to face with non-Muslims, particularly Hindus. This state of combat acted as a whip, which did not let them slip. Now we are ourselves, without any combat with any other which has made us indolent. The fact that before the partition of the Indian sub-continent we were in

close competition with Hindus, which kept the individuals of our nation careful, is right to a great extent. However, looking sincerely and with open eyes would show that the field of competition and opposition has grown very much larger. Whereas formerly the competition was with one or two nations and that too within the bounds of the sub-continent, now our competition has continued to remain with the Hindu nation, which also has now extended to international levels and this international competition is not restricted to Hindus but we are in combat more or less with most nations.

In addition, we have to fight with others not only in one field but also in every field. Earlier we were under the British and the defence of India was their responsibility, though by far and large, it was at the cost of our own lives. Now we have to defend the borders of our homeland ourselves. The pleasure derived in this defence of the borders of our homeland is unsurpassed in its depth and intensity. However, unfortunately the difference is that a large proportion of our scholars, merchants, politicians and leaders are selfish. The multitude of the perpetrators of this attitude does not view the state of our multifarious offensive and defensive problems with the same depth that it demands. The result is lack of the spirit of collective offence and defence. As a result, we are in complete disarray. Such persons are not prepared to see beyond their nose. This state of affairs is totally disruptive. Hazrat Allamah states that if particles join together whole-heartedly they become strong. Anything colliding with this congregation would be shattered like glass. On the other hand if these very particles are deprived of cooperation and sympathy they are blown away by gusts of wind.

*Becoming dust would make you to be an offering to wind
If you become a stone you could be used to smash glass*

The problem concerns the whole garden and not any individual nest, the whole city and not some individual home. Moreover if we consider the duties of the Muslim *Ummah*, entrusted by God to them the problem is not restricted to any particular Islamic country, not even to the Muslim *Ummah* but covers the whole human race. The Muslim *Ummah* knows that God has created it for abolishing oppression, tyranny, violence, despotism, injustice and bloodshed from the whole world. The covenant conferred by Divine Order on the Muslim *Ummah* is contained in the following Qur'anic verse:

And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men, women, and children, whose cry is, ---Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Thee one who will protect and raise for us from Thee one who will help!”

(The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali,, new revised 1989 edition, 4:75)

God has given the mandate to this *Ummah* to intervene with any society to annihilate oppression and injustice. Either deny the Qur’an or this verse having the above connotation. Now, if in the light of this and other similar Divine orders this *Ummah* has been commissioned with the duty of creating universality, betterment, blessing, ease and happiness for the human race, it is incumbent on this *Ummah* to become the most powerful nation in the world after God, which could subdue every power denying the sovereignty of God. Qur’an is the last message of God and the custodians of this message should be alive to their collective responsibility in this regard. In the words of Hazrat Allamah:

You are the potent hand and the word of the Eternal God
O Imprudent one! Develop Faith, as you have been overcome with doubts

The house is ephemeral, the dweller is momentary, Yours is the Beginning and the End

You are the Final Message of God, you are Eternal

*Your nature is the custodian of all the life’s possibilities
So to say you are you are the touchstone for world’s jewels.*

(B«ng-i-Dar«: “ñulë‘-i-Isl«m’)

The Muslims are the potent hand as well as the Word of the Eternal God. But the doubt–ridden Muslim nation has not yet made firm determination of engaging with its own enemies and the rebels against God in every field. Though some chains of political slavery have been broken and some still remain, but the fetters of intellectual slavery are harder than physical chains. Instead of annihilating oppression and tyranny from every society the Muslims themselves are oppressed and tyrannized in every corner of the

world. They have become the target of annihilation in Afghanistan., victims of bloodshed in India, are killed by the thousand in Syria, crushed completely in the Philippines and killed mercilessly in Palestine, brutalized in Kashmir, and life has been made impossible for them in Abyssinia. This state of affairs is completely against and contrary to the “mandate” of God. Now, either Muslims should prove themselves to be the custodians of the Holy Qur’an or the Holy Qur’an may be taken away from them and be conferred upon some other nation, which may be really willing and prepared to propagate really the Will of God. God has issued the clear warning in the Holy Qur’an that if they turn their back and revolt, God would plant some other nation in their place, and that nation would not be like them, which means not useless like you. Hazrat Allamah has also warned against this danger with great anguish:

*I am very much afraid of the day when God would deprive Muslims
And may start bestowing the warmth of His Love on some other society*

This takes us back to where we started, i.e. Hazrat Allamah stated the advice of Data Ganj Bakhsh to a young man and explained that if the stone starts believing itself to be weak becoming shattered becomes its destiny. The self respecting men of God consider enemies stronger than themselves to be the grace of God, because they get rid of their weaknesses and put their abilities to use only on account of their strong enemies.

Enemies surround us. It is necessary not to be disappointed by this state of affairs. The antidote for this is to know the demands of our existence and be cognizant of its real importance.. The last message of God is the custodian of the highest standards of etiquette of humaneness and ways of manhood. We have to strive hard to protect the human race from the consequences of the excesses of its own actions and thought. If we have to fulfil the obligations of leadership of mankind, we will have to prove ourselves worthy of the same. The road is long and the destination hard, but “It befits only those who have high courage.”