

## Waiting for Justice

To an outside observer, the people of Pakistan appear as a very enigmatic nation. Why is it, one wonders, that a nation plagued with crime, terrorism, sectarian and ethnic violence, widespread abuse of power, unbridled corruption, nepotism, illiteracy, and continuously worsening poverty — among other evils — still manages to celebrate, enjoy, and rejoice like the most satisfied people on earth? Shouldn't they be striving incessantly to redress their predicament? Why do they seem so patient and stoical? Have they simply resigned themselves to their fate, believing that improvement lies beyond the realm of possibility? Or is it that each one of them has consciously decided to pursue his own interest, with total disregard for the interest of the community?

Paradoxically, the level of political consciousness is quite high among the Pakistani populace, and it would be totally wrong to label them as an uninformed and insensitive people. Thus, conversations in buses, offices, and sitting rooms, as well as opinions expressed in newspaper columns and at various public forums, clearly indicate the extent of their discontent. In addition, a strong desire for a positive change is also found almost everywhere. Despite the vulgar and tasteless display of festivity during the Golden Jubilee celebrations, the general mood of the nation has been quite somber, making evident the anguish it feels at its own woeful condition. It is abundantly obvious, therefore, that the people of Pakistan are not, and cannot be, unaware of the root cause of their problems, which is a *lack of justice* in all spheres of collective life.

Indeed, Pakistanis are fully cognizant of how a regal minority is taking advantage of the hapless majority, how the many are being exploited for the benefit of the few. They can see the money flowing upwards, benefits and perks being given to the already privileged, resources being concentrated among the aristocratic elite. They know that only a certain parasitic class has access to the higher echelons of state and bureaucracy, that the best of civic facilities, health-care, and education is reserved for the chosen few, leaving majority of the populace in a state of utter deprivation. It is common knowledge how our national resources are routinely plundered by the rich and mighty of the land, how offices and posts are awarded to the unmerited and undeserving, how governmental patronage is allocated on the basis of contacts and influence rather than competition and merit. The people also know that when it comes to the implementation of law, certain persons can get away with the most heinous crimes, while it is the commoners who suffer all kinds of retributions, deserved or not. Values like accountability, justice, and fair play have been turned into mere words which have lost all semblance of meaning.

In view of the above observations, it is no wonder that people are feeling the pangs of restlessness and frustration. Although it seems as if virtually everyone is talking about what is wrong and what is required, the fact of the matter is that most are not inclined to *do* anything. Notwithstanding the high level of awareness, passivity and inaction is still the rule. Everyone intuitively knows that talking is one of the most effortless tasks in the world, and that nothing substantial was ever achieved in the world by mere wishing; but when the topic is Pakistan's plight, this is precisely what most of us can manage to contribute: best wishes.

It must be acknowledged that not everyone is sitting idle. A number of people are striving, either in their individual capacity or as part of organized groups, to bring about

improvements in their respective fields. However, as many of us are beginning to realize, the politico-economic system in Pakistan has decayed to such an extent that no appreciable improvement is now possible with only superficial and minor reforms. Moreover, the influence and hold of the collective order has become so overwhelming in our times that, practically speaking, any endeavor to effect positive changes in one field is nullified by the overall decadence and corruption. For instance, attempts to inculcate moral values through educational institutions and mosques are greatly undermined by the materialistic trend of our society and the powerful influence of mass media. Finally, the performance of private individuals and organizations is obviously quite limited, and is mostly confined to narrow circles. It may also be noted that voluntary organizations are meant to augment and supplement governmental efforts; they cannot be a substitute for the latter. For instance, while raising money to send a sick child abroad for treatment is a noble and compassionate act, the fact remains that millions of sick people are suffering for want of proper medical care, and that these people cannot be helped unless the overall economic setup is drastically changed.

The conclusion here is obvious: instead of treating each area of life or each institution in isolation, the whole politico-economic order should be viewed as a single organic entity. While individual efforts are praiseworthy in themselves, what is needed is a pooling of human and material resources in order to strive for the establishment of justice at the collective level. The politically aware Pakistanis fully understand that no improvement is possible unless true and genuine justice is established in the social, political, economic, and legal domains. They are also mindful of the need for a just distribution of resources, the need to make sure that the wealth does not stagnate among the rich, the need to have complete equality in the execution and enforcement of law, and the need to eliminate arbitrary exercise of power — the hallmark of feudal mentality. But then comes the real difficulty. It is self-evident that the establishment of justice requires hard and persistent struggle, and this is precisely what most of us are unwilling to undertake. It is in this sense that the Pakistani Muslims have generally been inert; even though they are aware of the ailment as well as the cure, most of them have no desire to strive for the achievement of a genuine change in society, and, more often than not, their efforts are directed only towards raising their own standards of living.

There are a number of reasons for this noncommittal attitude and immobility, but probably the most basic and the most serious is our distorted conception of Islam itself. Injustice and its disastrous consequences are seen everywhere, but the solution — establishment of the *Islamic System of Social Justice* — is not as obvious to everyone. Even our educated classes are unable to see any direct relationship between religion and social justice. What is the cause of our ignorance? Somewhere along the line, we transformed the most perfect and complete code of human existence — *Deen Al-Haq* — into a mere collection of dogma and ritual. We gradually lost sight of the fact that Islam provides the perfect model for all round justice, as well as the guidance and methodology to establish that justice in real life. We forgot that all the higher values concerning human dignity, equality, freedom, and fraternity, that are said to have been born in Europe during and after the Renaissance, are actually our own forgotten treasures. We also lost the ability to go beyond our egoistic and mundane motives to strive for the uplift and welfare of the community, and of humanity at large.

In this context, there are two versions of Islam that are at odds with each other in today's world: on the one hand there is the quietistic, non-political, static Islam that tends to support the status quo, and on the other hand is the active, political, dynamic Islam that seeks to change the world. The vibrant and forcefully motivating verses of the Qur'an as well as the determined and energetic struggle of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) leave no ambiguity as to

the true nature of Islam. The passive and static religiosity insidiously diffused among the Muslim masses during the age of *Malukiyyah*, or kingship, and has nothing to do with the dynamic teachings of Islam. It is absolutely true that, at an individual level, Islam focuses on the achievement of spiritual nearness to Allah (SWT), and the cultivation of a relationship between a human being and the Creator that is based on love and sincerity. What must be kept in mind is that this goal is for the *individual* Muslim only. The highest value and the ultimate target of Islam at the collective or social level, on the other hand, is the establishment of justice in all spheres of human life.

It may be noted that the two goals of Islam — *Taqarrub Billah* at an individual level and *Al-Adl Al-Ijtima'iyah* at the collective level — are so intimately bound with each other as to be totally inseparable. The ultimate purpose of both these ideals, of course, is to please Allah (SWT) and to gain salvation in the Hereafter, but what is the nature of the relationship between the two?

Living under an exploitative and iniquitous system, the deprived and dispossessed masses find themselves in an impossible situation. They are so encumbered with the perpetual ordeal of keeping themselves and their dependents alive that, for them, the achievement of Divine knowledge, purification of self, and fulfillment of spiritual potential no longer remain viable goals. Thus, the unfair and unjust socio-economic order becomes the biggest barrier between God and His creatures. This fact was elucidated by Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-1762), the brilliant Muslim sociologist, who taught that an unjust distribution of wealth acts as a double-edged sword, causing destruction on both sides of the social divide. Accumulation of wealth in one segment of society leads to immorality, self-indulgence, and wantonness; on the other hand, poverty and deprivation in the rest of the society reduces human beings to the levels of beasts. In this way, absence of collective justice leads the whole society — both the haves and the have-nots — in a direction away from God. The Islamic imperative to establish justice is meant to ensure that an environment is created where Allah (SWT) can be loved, worshipped, and obeyed — and *falah* of the Hereafter sought — without any external hindrance or impediment.

It must also be noted that, in contrast to a communist who sees nothing beyond material well-being and the rule of the proletariat, a Muslim's struggle is primarily geared to please the Lord and evade the torments of Hell-fire in the life hereafter. For him, the struggle to establish a just politico-economic order in this world is not an end in itself, but the means to attain salvation in *Al-Aakhirah*. A true altruist, he is concerned with saving his own soul as well as the souls of his fellow human beings.

During the period of the Muslim *Ummah's* decline that spanned several centuries, Islam was reduced from a dynamic movement aimed at establishing God's sovereignty on earth to a mere religion where the cultivation of personal piety is the final objective. Today, this narrow version of *Deen* has become the biggest obstacle in the establishment of Islam as a socio-political order (*Iqamah Al-Deen*). Muslims have been conditioned to believe that *Taqwa* consists of outward form only, that the highest virtue is to give up the world and concentrate on one's spiritual development, and that there are no obligations beyond the five pillars of Islam. The Muslim mind has, consequently, developed a tendency to view social and political activism as belonging to the secular domain of life — and therefore having lesser value than spiritual matters — rather than the unavoidable duty ordained by Almighty Allah (SWT). The Islamic teachings, on the other hand, make it absolutely clear that a Muslim is not allowed to spend his time in quiet worship in the face of flagrant violations of Divine commandments. He cannot remain a silent spectator while the society around him

sinks into sinfulness. Indeed, if *haram* and corrupt practices do not provoke his fury, and if injustice and vice do not stimulate him into action, then his very avowal of *Iman* is questionable.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) once explained how Almighty Allah (SWT) ordered Angel Gabriel to destroy a particular city along with its inhabitants. Gabriel said: “O Lord! Verily amongst them lives such a such slave of yours who does not spend even a moment in your disobedience.” Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said that Almighty Allah (SWT) replied: “Overthrow the city, first on him and then on others, for his face never changed color for me.” That is, he remained complacent in his worship even though My commands were being transgressed right before his eyes and.

This and numerous other traditions of the Prophet (SAW) amply demonstrate that an individual’s piety and devoutness to God is of no use unless it is accompanied by *enjoining the good and forbidding the evil*. In an age when *Deen* of Allah (SWT) no longer reigns supreme, the performance of supererogatory acts (*nawafil*) lose their significance and, in their place, the obligation to struggle for the establishment of God’s sovereignty in all spheres of collective life assumes foremost importance.

The following Qur’anic *ayah* underscores the significance of the obligation to establish Islam’s Order of Justice:

We have surely sent our messengers with clear signs (i.e., miracles and proofs), and sent with them the Book (i.e., revealed guidance) and the Balance (i.e., the *Shari’ah*), so that mankind may stand by justice; and (to overcome those who cause obstruction in establishing justice) We sent down iron wherein is mighty power (of warfare) and (many other) uses for mankind, so that God may (test those who claim to be believers and) know who helps Him and His messengers (by using the force of iron), though unseen. Verily God (does not need your help, as He Himself) is Strong, Mighty. (Al-Hadeed 57:25)

Allah (SWT) has made it very clear in this *ayah* that His *Shari’ah* represents a Balance which must be used by mankind to adjudicate the rights and obligations of each and every person. The *Shari’ah* should govern and define the nature of the relationship between individuals as well as that between individuals and society. It can be seen that justice in Islam is based on the imperatives of Divine Revelation and not on the whims and desires of the rulers who are themselves subject to the Word of God. Any reflective reader of the Qur’an will appreciate the force and vigor with which it categorically rejects the idea of anyone other than God having the absolute authority to rule. The *Ulul Amr* are chosen by the Muslims to run the affairs of the state in accordance with the injunctions of Islam, whether they are contained in the Qur’an itself or explained and demonstrated by the Prophet (SAW). Rulers cannot formulate laws or issue orders that are totally or partially in contravention to the Divine imperative of establishing justice. If they do, people have the right to refuse obedience. When and how should they use this right, however, is a different issue.

According to the *ayah* quoted above, the objective and goal of the advent of messengers and of sending down the Scripture and the *Shari’ah* is to establish the collective order wherein this God-given Balance can be used by mankind in actual fact, not just in rhetoric. Although God is Strong and Mighty, He wants to try those who claim to be believers by asking them to “help” Him and His Prophet (SAW). Unless the believers invest the better part of their energies in establishing this Balance *de facto*, their tall claims of being the most devoted followers of Islam would amount to absolutely nothing. Establishment of justice, in the above *ayah*, stands out as having pivotal importance not only as the purpose for which the

Scripture and the Law were revealed by Allah (SWT), but also as the criterion by which He tests the veracity and sincerity of the believers' declaration of faith. Thus, the Qur'anic command to strive for the establishment of justice — or, what is the same thing, the establishment of *Deen* — is not something that can be avoided, or substituted with individual piety, or deferred for any length of time. This obligation is a personal one (*Fard 'Ain*), and each one of us is accountable before Almighty Allah (SWT) regarding the extent to which one fulfills this duty.

In this background, the case of Pakistan appears to be a particularly deplorable one. While the struggle to establish Islam as the dominant force in every sphere of collective life is the obligation of all Muslims irrespective of their race, nation, or country of origin, this responsibility is a matter of life and death for the Pakistani Muslims. Here is a country that owes its very existence to Islam, a country that was carved out of the Indian subcontinent in the name of the separate identity of Muslims, a country that has, therefore, no foundation for an honorable and independent existence except its ideology. For Pakistan, Islam is not one of several options: it is the only one.

The founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1976-1948), was very clear as to what will be the distinguishing characteristic of this country: In his mind, Pakistan was going to be a true Islamic State. He said on November 21, 1945, while addressing the Frontier Muslim League Conference in Peshawar:

Muslims demand Pakistan, where they could rule according to their own code of life and according to their own culture, traditions, and Islamic laws.

He reiterated his position on January 25, 1948, while addressing the Karachi Bar Association:

Islam today is as much a practicable religion as it was thirteen hundred years ago. It is a standard bearer of democracy. It is Islam which guarantees justice, fair play, and equal rights to everyone. And the whole world will see that we will frame our constitution in accordance with it.

Jinnah was also unequivocal in his condemnation of feudalism and uncontrolled capitalism, two of the most evil means of exploitation that are thriving unhampered in his Pakistan. He said on April 24, 1943, while addressing the annual session of the All India Muslim League in Delhi: “

Here I should like to give a warning to the landlord and capitalists who have flourished at our expense by a system which is so vicious, which is wicked and which makes them so selfish that it is difficult to reason with them. The exploitation of the masses has gone into their blood. They have forgotten the lesson of Islam. ...Do you visualize that millions have been exploited and cannot get one meal a day! If this is the idea of Pakistan, I would not have it.”

He further said on November 5, 1944, while speaking at the first meeting of the All India Muslim League Planning Committee:

It is not our purpose to make the rich richer and to accelerate the process of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of few individuals. We should aim at leveling up the general standard of living amongst the masses and I hope your committee will pay due attention to this very important question. Our ideal should not be capitalistic but Islamic, and the interests and welfare of the people as a whole should be kept constantly in mind.

In the context of the Islamic imperative to establish social justice, the ideas of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, too, are very lucid and unambiguous. Here are a few of his particularly eloquent couplets:

In other words, the Qur'an represents a death-warrant for the money-grabbing capitalist, and is the supporter and protector of all who are destitute. Nothing good can come from the selfish worshiper of money, as the Qur'an says that you cannot attain righteousness unless you spend of things you love.

Interest or *Riba* augments nothing but mischief and evil; it is deplorable that people have no desire to alleviate the troubles of their fellow human beings by giving them interest-free loans. Taking interest is a grievous sin that darkens the soul and hardens the heart; one who eats *Riba* becomes, in reality, a savage monster though he does not have fangs or claws.

The present-day banking system is a result of planning by the sly Jews; it extinguishes God's light in the bosom of man. Wisdom, civilization, and *Deen* cannot be established without demolishing this *Riba*-based economic order.

Feudalism is another form of exploitation, and it is at odds with the true spirit of Islam. God has made lawful for man to extract his food from the fertile lands, but the land belongs to God alone (and not to the landlord). We can use the earth for our benefit, but none of us can become its owner. The only real Lord and Owner of everything that exists is God Himself; a believer considers whatever he has to be a trust (*Amanah*) from God, as everything other than Him is going to be perished.

O Muslim! Pride for the Qur'an is not enough. It is time to get out of your nooks and proclaim the message of Islam and the meaning of the *Shari'ah* to the world. The most fundamental objective of the Islamic *Shari'ah* is to create a society where no one is dependent on another human being for his sustenance (because the State takes care of the basic needs of all citizens.)

In view of the above quotations, it is obvious that Pakistan was meant to become a model of the Islamic ideals of equality, fraternity, and justice — a beacon of light for the whole world. The contrast between vision and reality, however, is a staggering one. The extent of unfairness and injustice we today have in our homeland is ample testimony to the vice and venality of the leadership we have had so far. The fact that Iqbal and Jinnah's great idea of a true Islamic State never did materialize — nor, it appears, it would for quite some time — also says a lot about the inertia of Pakistani Muslims in general.

What, then, is the way out?

The implementation of Islamic teachings in their totality, especially those concerning social justice, requires that the unjust, iniquitous, and corrupt system dominant in our society be uprooted. It is only after the collapse of the existing order that a new, just, and equitable system can take shape. Both the destructive and the constructive aspects of this tremendous task necessitate an organized and disciplined effort. Haphazard and unmethodical attempts lacking a well-defined goal can lead to anarchy and mob rule. Doing nothing, however, is even more dangerous: passivity on the part of the people gives an open license — a *carte blanche* — to the ruling elite and its cohorts, allowing them the freedom to do as they wish.

Many of us are harboring a wishful hope that often crops up during informal conversations: *Maybe a Khomeini-like stern leader will come to power, who will then straighten everything out with an iron hand.* Celebrating the fiftieth year of independence, we should now be mature enough to realize that this is merely a fairy-tale myth. Passively waiting for a savior, à la Cinderella, will not get us anywhere. Even sincere supplications to Allah (SWT) are useless if they are not accompanied by wholehearted effort. We are entitled to expect "Divine succor and an early victory" only after we have done all that *can* be done, all that is humanly possible. Indeed, in the final analysis, there is no substitute for sheer hard work.

In connection with the predicament of the Muslim *Ummah* in general and that of the Pakistani Muslims in particular, three verses of the Holy Qur'an (Aal-e-Imran 3:102-4) provide us with all the practical guidance we need for our salvation. The remarkable feature of these verses is that they describe, in just a few words, the entire plan of action that must be adopted by Muslims, both at individual and collective levels, if they are to succeed in the Hereafter and redress their continuing humiliation in this world. Dr. Israr Ahmad, Ameer of Tanzeem-e-Islami, has explained this plan of action in his numerous lectures, particularly two of his public speeches delivered at Karachi in 1985 and 1990. Despite this gap of five years, the two lectures were published together in Urdu on account of their common purpose and subject matter. English translation of the points covered in these public addresses is included in the present issue of "The Qur'anic Horizons," under the title *Three Point Action-Agenda for the Muslim Ummah*. It is hoped that this translation will be instrumental in educating and

enlightening all those who profess to be Muslims regarding the responsibilities of the Muslim *Ummah* as a whole, as well as the duties of its individual members. Indeed, understanding our Divinely ordained obligations is the first step towards the establishment of the Islamic System of Social Justice.