

Imam Khomeini: The Architect of an Enlightened Nation

TAFAZAL HUSSAIN

One who enlightened millions of hearts with the light of God and morality ceased to beat when Imam's moment of union finally arrived at 10.20 pm on 3rd June 1989

This article traces the advent of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini'S tryst with a tough journey, ultimately leading the Iranians to a dignified, enlightened and empowered position. It is a tribute to this great revolutionary on the commemoration of his 25th death anniversary. Iranian nation enlightened by the guiding principles of great revolution led by Imam is on the rise to play a significant role in world peace and progress. The revolution of Iran has shaped the destiny of this nation on the strong foundation of enlightened people with self-belief, national pride, skill development and progressive mindsets. Notwithstanding, the horrible impact of the international sanctions, freezing of financial earnings, ban on international trade and many deprivations Iranians withstood all the painful consequences of this international isolation and reigned high on self-belief, indigenization of research and development and tangible progress.

Imam Khomeini was recognized as one of the teachers and Jurist consultants with authority in Fiqh (jurisprudence) principles, philosophy, Erfan (mysticism) and ethics and taught as such in Qom theological schools including the Fyziyeh, the A'zam, Mohammadiyah and Salamasi mosques and the Hajj Molla Sadeq School. At the highest level he taught jurisprudence and introduced lessons on the theological foundations of the Islamic Governance, at Sheykh Ansari Mosque in Najaf Theological Centre for 14 years. His lessons included dissemination of knowledge about Ahl-e-beyt (the house hold of the Prophet PBUH).

The spirit of challenge and jihad in the path of Allah had its roots in Imam's childhood, religious background, and family environment, and in the socio-political conditions of his entire life. All this was borne out of an inner volcano slowly gathering steam in his mind as he witnessed oppression and exploitation of the Iranian people from his early childhood. His leadership emerged as head of the clergy in Qom over the disputes on town and city councils in 1961-62 and rose to lead a revolution that changed the destiny of an oppressed nation into a vibrant, progressive and technology driven nation, with high esteem. An all-inclusive uprising of the Iranian nation started on 5th June 1963. This was characterised by two outstanding features - the sole leadership of Imam and the Islamic motives and objectives of the movement. Thus it marked a new chapter in the struggle of the Iranian nation, later came to be known as Islamic Revolution worldwide. Imam has described his memoirs dating back when he was 12, about the World War. Those memories had already set in a thought process in a young boy, slowly revolutionizing him for a historic future leadership job.

What he remembered about those wars is conveyed in the following words:
" I recall both world wars. I was attending elementary school. I used to see Soviet troops in a centre, we had in Khomeini. In the First World War we were often subjected to raids."
" The khans and the rebels, under government protection were pilfering the people and trespassing on the chastity of the women "

" I have been fighting since childhood... We were invaded by the Zolqis and the Rajabalis...[.].... The ruffians meant to raid and rob us."

Earlier in 1920, the coup in Iran by Raza Khan Mir Panj with the British support gave birth to another dictatorial system in which 1000 family clan replaced the former khans and insurgents and ruled over the oppressed nations' destiny. Government and the British elements were all along wary of the Iranian clergy and thus regular assaults took place against them. However, the clergy stood unfazed and took steps from time to time to preserve Islam and ward off emerging threats.

Imam had since migrated to Qom (a famous Islamic teaching centre in Iran) and had been regarded as an active leader and an outstanding scholar. Imam had by then acquired extraordinary talent after having completed studies at various levels in the Arak and Khomeini`s theological assemblies. Imam in cooperation with other clergy prepared a plan for essential reforms of the structure of the theological assembly, which received support of the students of the Imam and enlightened clergy of the assembly.

Imam's role in thwarting the ill designs of the Pehelwi government was characterised by increased American influence favouring support of Israel and the enhancement of relations between Iran and the Israel. This also was signaling another danger of infiltration of followers of Bahaim in Iranian defence services.

Meanwhile the US influenced process of tapering of constitution and deleting certain conditions for eligibility for elections to councils was also declared as un-islamic. Imam accompanied the grand ulema of Qom and Tehran and started the movement with strong protests against the ruler.

The form of protest also through open letters and telegrams addressed to Raza Shah and the then Prime minister Amir Asadollah Alam were highly effective with a sharp tone. One such cable read as under:

"I once more advise you to obey God and follow the constitution and beware of violating the Quran and the decrees of the nation's ulama and the constitutional law. Don't endanger the country deliberately and for no reason. Otherwise, the Muslim Ulama will not desist expressing their views about you."

The grand victory on the issue of provincial and county councils was a valuable experience of the Iranian nation. The specific characteristics of a personality came to be recognized as a worthy leader of the Islamic community.

However, American pursuit for achieving its ambitions of opening the Iranian doors to Israelis continued. Consequently, Shah's urgency to introduce reforms under the clandestine understanding with US compelled Imam to protest by boycotting traditional festivities of Nowrooz. He charged the Shah as the confederate of Israel and invited people to rise against Raza Shah Pehalwi regime.

He was not getting desired support from a large number of Ulemas in Qom, Najaf (Iraq) and in other Muslim regions. Instead their silence was causing a serious damage to the uprising

and painfully remarked, " Today Silence means cooperation with the court of the tyrant" and " Being a Royalist means a Plunderer".

Imam was also faced with another setback. This followed a direction of Grand Religious Authority Ayatollah Hakim from Najaf to Ulema and religious authorities in Iran to pack up for collective migration to Najaf.

Imam used the occasion of 40th day observance on 22nd April 1963 of the Feyziyeh School calamity and emphasized that the Ulema and the Iranian people should cooperate with the heads of Muslim and Arab States to confront, oppose and condemn the pacts between the Shah and Israel.

A personality with a cherished mission had to face innumerable difficulties through arrests, persecution after he delivered a historical speech at the Feyziyeh School in the afternoon of Ashoora on 13 Khordad 1342/ June 1963. This marked the opportunity to apprise the people about the immense dangers posed by Pahalwi monarchy and revealed the hidden relations between the Shah and the Israel. He asked the people to rise against the dictatorial regime of the Shah.

Imam, while pointing to Shah, said: "I advise you to stop your actions. Mister they fool you! I don't see the people be thankful for your departure if some day they make you leave. If something is being dictated for you to read, think about it. . .accept my advice...What is the relation between the Shah and Israel that makes the Savak say: 'do not speak of Israel ...Is the Shah an Israeli or what?'

A day after this revolutionary speech, Iranian Ruler ordered brutal repression of the people to suppress the uprising. As a result a large number of Imam's friends were arrested. At the same time, hundreds of commandos laid siege of the Imam's House and arrested him while in Namaz. First he was lodged in the officer`s club in Tehran and in the evening was shifted to Qasr Prison. After 19 days in the Qasr prison the Imam was transferred to a jail in Eshratyab Military Base.

After his release from the jail in 1964, Imam in one of his speeches announced: " let the world know that all the troubles of the Iranian Nation and the Muslim nations are from the US, from the imperialists. It is the US that supports Israel and its friends. It is the US that empowers Israel to make Muslim Arabs homeless..."

This statement angered the rulers so much so that the commandos laid siege to Imam's house in Qom, while in Namaz. He was picked up, directly taken to Tehran's Mehrabad Airport, put on board a military aircraft and flown to Ankara the capital of Turkey. His exile on the grounds of national security was strongly protested by Iranians all across the country. He was in exile in Turkey for 11 months and this period was used by Shah Regime ruthlessly to smash the resistance and also hurriedly effected the US dictated reforms. Imam during this exile compiled a voluminous book titled, "Tahrirul Vasileh".

Imam, accompanied by his son Ayatollah Hajj Aqa Mustafa, faced second exile of 13 long years to another country, this time Iraq on 12th October 1965. Upon arrival, he performed pilgrimage in holy shrines in Kazemeyn, Samaria and Karbala. A week later, he moved to his residence in Najaf. The Imam faced a different variant of

torture during this time through opposition, obstructions and taunting face to face by the enemy and even by the pseudo- clergy.

Imam, known for his patience, had later, on several times mentioned about this bitterness. These lowly acts never came in the way of his mission. On the other hand, his lessons and teachings came to be known as the most outstanding both on quality and quantity in Theological Assembly in Najaf.

Imam maintained his close contact with movement in Iran and pursued the objectives of the uprising. Even while in exile Imam issued a fatwa on 9th October 1968 allocating a portion of religious alms funds to help Palestinian cause.

Imam's sufferings compounded in 1969 during exile in Iraq when dispute over river borderline heightened with Iran, resulting in forced migration of Iranian residents. Imam was so upset that in a cable to President of The Iraq, he condemned this harsh action of government and in protest decided to leave but was denied the departure for reasons of reaction of the people.

Iranian people were increasingly getting involved in uprising, chanting slogans like, "Praise unto Khomeini and death to the Paharvi Dynasty". These demonstrations followed mass imprisonments besides imposition of ban on political and religious organizations on a large scale. Fortunately these happenings received wide media coverage at international level also. Imam termed the martyrdom of his son Ayatollah Hajj Aqa Mostafa Khomeini in 1977 as, "a divine blessing in disguise".

This sacrifice was a turning point for renewed uprising by the theological assemblies and the rise of the religious society. The year witnessed martyrdom of large number of revolutionary students and members of clergy, particularly in Qom.

A conspiracy was hatched between Iranian and Iraqi foreign ministers in New York to deport Imam from Iraq. Yet another era of sufferings dawned on Imam and decided his next country in exile as Kuwait. Iranian government prevailed here too and Imam was thus denied entry.

Lebanon and Syria was also thought off by Imam but did not click. Imam after consultations with his son reached France on 5th October 1978 and settled in a suburban house in Paris. Though Imam was conveyed the views of French President to avoid indulgence in politics but conveyed in response that he would rather commute between airports from one country to another than giving up his objective.

Continuing his mission, imam established the Revolutionary Council in December 1978. The Shah fled the country after instaling Bakhtiar as head of the State. The entire country was in jubilation, singing and dancing. After 14 years in exile, finally on 1st February 1979 Imam arrived in his homeland to the unprecedented welcome of an estimated 6 million people after miserable failure of the Bakhtiar government in stalling his entry due to mass public anger. Imam had, in one of his speeches remarked, "The volume of tolerance of toils, pains, troubles, sacrifices and deprivations in this world is proportionate to the volume and greatness of the objectives and their value and loftiness of position".

Imam in his last message had written, "With a heart that is calm and confident; with a joyous soul and a conscience hopeful of God's graces, I take my leave from brothers and

sisters and journey to the eternal abode, and I very much need your good prayers. I ask the Benevolent God to accept my excuses for inadequate services and I ask the nation to accept my excuses for my shortages and inadequacies and to move forward with force, determination and will”.

A personality that had enlightened millions of hearts with the light of God and morality ceased to beat when Imam's moment of union finally arrived at 10.20 pm on 3rd June 1989. In a poem composed years before his heavenly departure he had presaged 15th of the month of Khordad eventful to himself in these words, "years go by, events do occur; of Khordad the 15th, we may expect succor”.

With over 9 million mourners in procession on 15th of Khordad , Imam's last journey to heavenly abode marked the dawn of a new era of Iranian nation, with a solemn renewed pledge.

What Iran reflects today is a proud example of a nation with strong commitment, positive attitudes, skill development and one among the top advanced countries in science and technology amongst numerous other glorious achievements in other fields. All this owes its origin to the benefits of the revolution led by Imam Khomeini (r.a) and ably carried forward by a committed leadership presently under the command of Ayatollah Khameini, the supreme leader of Iranians.