

Allama Mashriqi Desired to Erase Sectarianism

By Nasim Yousaf

The 10th of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar) is typically characterized by riots between these two sects, as it is on this date that the commemoration of Muharram reaches its peak level. The riots are a disconcerting example of the consequences of sectarian disharmony. Allama Mashriqi, a distinguished scholar on Islam and founder of the Khaksar Tehrik, was fiercely against sectarianism and, through his words and actions, set an example for today's leaders to follow.

Allama Mashriqi believed that bigotry and sectarianism were incredibly divisive forces among humanity — therefore, he always preached unity. The ideology of his Khaksar Tehrik (which he founded in 1930) offers insight into Mashriqi's views on the subject. The word *Akhuwat* (brotherhood) was inscribed on the Tehrik's flag as well as on the shoulder badge of every Khaksar. It was meant to send a lucid message to the world that the Khaksars stood for unity and brotherhood. According to a decree by Mashraqi on October 15, 1937: "The Khaksar will not interfere with the belief of any sects of Muslims, for he considers the freedom of belief as the religious right of every Muslim; but he stands for unity among all these sections." Thus, Mashriqi sought a harmonious and peaceful society by defeating all sectarian sentiments and "religious prejudices of mankind."

Mashraqi's desire to seek a non-sectarian society is perhaps best exemplified by his intervention in the Sunni-Shia riots in Lucknow (India). The riots began in the month of Muharram in 1939. By March or April of 1939, "20,000" Muslims had been imprisoned and "hundreds were wounded...and thousands... starved" (as discussed at the Central Legislative Assembly on September 23, 1942). Mashraqi was quite upset by this state of affairs. In order to put an end to the tumult and chaos, he sent numerous telegrams to the Government of U.P. When the Government – which, according to Mashraqi, was behind the skirmishes – failed, Mashraqi issued a directive to Khaksars to reach Lucknow. In compliance with Mashraqi's instructions, a large number of Khaksars from various provinces of British India arrived in Lucknow. Mashraqi joined them there and held meetings with leaders of both sects. After hectic efforts, an amicable settlement between the two sects was attained. Thus, Mashraqi brought the sufferings of the people to an end.

Mashraqi firmly believed in harmony and stood up against all forces that promoted division. We must learn from his message of *Akhuwat* and philosophy of a non-sectarian society. It is imperative that the leaders of today follow Mashraqi's example in order to guide people to peace and brotherhood, regardless of religion, sect, caste, color or creed. Furthermore, leaders who promote sectarianism for vested reasons must be condemned. Equanimity, tolerance and respect towards different faiths needs to prevail if the threat of a global sectarian war is to be prevented. Indeed, Mashraqi's message to the world to rise above sectarianism and forge unity is one that must not be forgotten.

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