

The Renaissance Man

By
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“On some positions, Cowardice asks the question "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question "Is it politic?" And Vanity comes along and asks the question "Is it popular?" But Conscience asks the question "Is it right?" And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right.

What Florence was to Renaissance in Europe during the middle ages, Karachi is to Political renaissance in the 21st century Pakistan; No mention of Political renaissance in Pakistan can be complete without the mention of Altaf Hussain the most composite and controversial personality whose meteoric emergence on the horizon in the chequered political history of Pakistan’s passage through six decades of feudal dominated political milieu created a roller coaster effect and sent ripples through the stagnant pools of the powerful political establishment.

Renaissance was never so popular with the Church, the establishment and perpetrators of status-quo in middle ages. Nor is Altaf Hussain with the extremist clergy, power hungry feudals, the decadent establishment and the cunning champions of adhocism.

As much as Renaissance was a cultural "advance" from the Middle Ages and a clear "break" from Medieval thought and practice in Europe, the advent of Altaf Hussain popularly known as *Quaid-e-Tehreek Altaf Bhai* in the political arena of Pakistan sent a clear signal to the feudal dominated establishment and its patrons in various section of Pakistan’s ruling hierarchy to say Adieu to the decadent political and social practices or become history in the grand archives of Pakistan’s political bibliography. Indeed this ambitious man from Karachi brought a new chapter to Pakistan’s young but rather eventful history when in 1978 he laid foundation to the political thought and later announced the creation of a political party in 1984 that today is nationally known as MQM (Muthahida Qaumi Movement) with sizable and meaningful presence achieved in the Senate, National Assembly, Sindh Assembly and AJ&K Assembly during the last elections.

Altaf started from a very humble background. Born in a family of hardworking middle class migrants from Agra who had settled in Karachi, Sindh he along with the seven brothers and four sisters was raised with tender care and strict discipline by the dotting parents. After graduating from Karachi University and armed with a degree in Pharmacy he entered the real world

Altaf Hussain stood against status quo and dared to challenge it from within and rattled many a nerve. The choice was to flow with the river and enjoy the heavenly perks and privileges as so astutely and factually put down in famous French Philosopher Voltaire's idiom *"Il est dangereux d'avoir raison dans des choses où des hommes accrédités ont tort"*. **It is dangerous to be right in matters where established men are wrong**". OR to go against the flow and proudly follow ones honest convictions as stated so courageously and eloquently by Martin Luther King Jr the renowned US civil rights leader *"On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question "Is it politic?" And Vanity comes along and asks the question "Is it popular?" But Conscience asks the question "Is it right?" And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right.*

MQM is the only party to have taken a brave public stand against terrorism post 9/11 and appreciated in the Muslim world and internationally as so poignantly acknowledged in the Wall Street Journal's editorial page write-up of Monday, October 1, 2001. *"Few doubt that it was by far the largest public gathering in support of war on terrorism, anywhere in the world. The Muthahida Quami Movement, one of Pakistan's largest political parties, organized the event and held it despite opposition from Pakistani government officials."* and in same article it says *"We are for the rights of the people, irrespective of their caste, sect or religion," Mr. Hussain thunders. "We must tell the people of the world that in Sindh [a province in Pakistan] there are liberal, democratic people who will stand up to terrorists"*. Altaf Hussain reiterated on January 21, 2006 while addressing Pakistani students in UK where he told the audience that *"MQM is a peace loving political party and is against terrorism in all its sorts, form, shape and manifestation."*

Such was the resolution of this passionate young man that helped him in determining and staying on course with courage, conviction and charisma that very early in Altaf Hussain's political career he managed to capture the attention and imagination of millions from amongst the teeming urban masses of Pakistan, this was a large group with cross sectional representation of poor class, lower middle class, middle class, as well as the upper class and spanning from Clerks to Vice Chancellors and Artisan to Businessmen. They all subscribed with faith in the leadership and the party.

Indeed it sent a very clear and strong message that the change is for real and knocking on the august doors of establishment and it is time for status quo to go.

Altaf Hussain's message and popular support was like a **coup d'état** to the establishment and its allies in civil, military bureaucracy as well as their beneficiaries and confidantes in feudal fiefdoms all over Pakistan. The message transcended the provincial divide and in no time reached the hamlets, mohallas and to the oppressed masses in the farmlands of Punjab, Seraiki belt, Sarhad , Northern Areas, Balochistan and AJ&K. People from both rural and urban areas realized that these (MQM) are different people and with a mission reflecting betterment of real people and emancipation of lower and middle classes and with no ulterior or hidden agendas reinforcing the baradaris and clans that have ruled with impunity and shamelessly under the guise of representing people.

The people of all provinces realized that the change is positive and will bring emancipation and liberty for all and deliver in form of a merit oriented society with empathy and one that will provide a social net, protect the poor and value the individual for their talent, worth and contribution and not because of their blue blood, connections, caste, creed or sect.



A Middle Ages painting depicting Peasants toiling in farms owned by Feudals

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With a multifaceted manifesto espousing Altaf's philosophy MQM promises empowerment to all segments of society irrespective of ethnicity, cast, creed and sect, introducing effective agrarian reforms, implementing

provincial autonomy and discouraging the monopolization of power in few hands and institutions will indeed be the path that will lead us to the cherished egalitarian society we dream of and make it a reality in our lifetime and set foundations for a progressive nation state that promises peace and prosperity for all and enable Pakistan to play its vital role in the region's economy and comity of nations with dignity and clout.

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