

CLAIMS AND REALITIES IN MODERN PAKISTANI SOCIETY

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PAKISTAN VIES WITH INDONESIA FOR THE SIXTH PLACE AMONG the nations of the modern world, as far as population figures are concerned. This alone should be reason enough for any student of current affairs to try and understand her problems.

In recent years, Pakistan's international status has undoubtedly grown—her word carries more weight in international affairs than it used to during the first ten years of her existence after the partition of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent in 1947. Since the elections of 1964-65 offer a fairly reliable promise of a certain stability during a number of years to come, the moment seems most appropriate for asking what the social background behind the political rise of Pakistan may be.

I

According to utterances made by her founders and by her present leaders, but also according to the view held by her ordinary citizens, Pakistan is first and foremost an Islamic country. Her historical *raison d'etre* was the wish of Indian Muslims for a political and social structure in which they could live according to the specific tenets of Islamic tradition without having to fear interference or discrimination by Non-Muslims. This generally accepted basis of Pakistan's independence seems at first sight traditionalist and defensive by nature. It seems tinged with regret that it was not possible, in 1947, to gather all the traditionally Muslim regions of the Subcontinent in the new State, and that it was necessary to leave about 50 million Indian Muslim under Non-Muslim rule, — with the result that Pakistan has to exercise a kind of moral guardianship for the welfare of her co-religionists left like hostages in India.

On a closer view, however, Pakistan's claim for a separate social identity is not as traditionalist, defensive, and protective as it may seem. Quite a number of Pakistanis refer to an "Islamic

Ideology" as a basis of their national existence, quote the teachings of their famous writer Iqbal, and claim that Pakistan knows the road towards an ideal society. This type of faith in Pakistan's historic mission is not expansionist, but definitely constructive. It passes beyond the mere wish to live in isolation from Non-Muslims and to continue the accustomed life.

First and foremost, the claim is made that a true Islamic society must by its very nature be democratic. The Quranic principles of human equality are placed against the concepts Non-Hindus have of the Hindu caste system. The classic examples of original Islamic democracy, e.g. the conflict between the Prophet Muhammad and the merchant community of Mecca, are cited. The brotherliness during the great Muslim festivals or during the mosque prayers is pointed out. The role of alms-giving among the duties of a pious Muslim is used as an example for the awakensness of the social conscience among the Faithful. All men are equal before God, and there is only one God. The President of Pakistan allows himself to be photographed standing in the line of praying men from all walks of life. Pakistan has considered the gaining of her independence as a liberation from the rule of Hindu landlords and from the alleged usury of Hindu money-lenders and village traders, belonging to the "banya"-class.

The insistence on the democratic character of Pakistan's "Islamic Ideology" has influenced Pakistani statesmen ever since the new State was founded. Without much thought, British parliamentary institutions were transferred because they had the reputation of being democratic. When the Army took over in 1958, this was declared only a temporary measure during a national emergency, and as soon as the regime had become stabilized President Ayub instituted "basic democracies". The constitution of 1962 is explicit in its democratic professions, and no one should think it was introduced mainly as a concession to the pressure of world opinion or of Pakistan's allies. Pakistanis from the President downwards want their government and their society to be democratic. By "democratic" they do not only understand an active participation of the citizens in the formation of the national will, but also a maximum of justice for the weaker social strata, and as far as possible an egalitarian order of Society without too many Maharajas and millionaires. Men should be humble before God and courteous towards their fellow-men. The Chief Secretary of West Pa-

kistan gave an order that the distinct Western dress of officials should be discarded, — during the summer a bush shirt and cotton trousers, so he said, were good enough for anybody, no matter how high his position was.

The second claim raised by the "Ideology of Pakistan" is that this Islamic country is truly independent. Pakistanis resent it bitterly when foreigners from other continents or even from Asia tell them that they owe their national existence to the British principle of Divide and Rule. They will not tolerate this insult from their Muslim brethren in other Islamic states, still less from their Indian neighbours. They point out that Muhamad Ali Jinnah tried to the very last moment to preserve the unity of the Subcontinent, and that the setting-up of a separate Pakistan in the end was the only way out of an impasse, but certainly not a ruse by which the Imperial Power tried to retain a foothold in Southern Asia. Cautious historians are inclined to agree with this Pakistani version of the events of 1946/47.

The taunts that Pakistan, since 1954, has become a puppet of the U.S. State Department, has made herself dependent on American Aid, and allows the Pentagon a large say in its vital affairs is still more resented. Pakistan has sought the friendship of other Islamic and of other Asian nations, and claims to have steered an independent course throughout, even if not a "neutralist" course. "Neutralism" as a political term seems too negative to Pakistani ears, and anyhow it smacks of Indian terminology. But independence Pakistanis certainly claim for their nation. This is why they were so keen to co-sponsor the first Bandung Conference in 1955, and this is why they take up Anti-Imperialist causes. Their ideology does not permit them to say that they are in the "Western" camp. They want to serve the cause of their own independence, allying themselves for definite purposes with whomever they like. Pakistani statesmen have made a special point in visiting and inviting other Muslim leaders and in professing international solidarity between Muslim nations.

The third important element of Pakistan's ideology is an energetic will towards economic development and social modernization. Historically, the Muslims of India were an under-privileged group, constituting either a rural society or only the ground level of the urban labour force, doing jobs like weaving or tanning which Hindus of standing refused to do. The peasants and workers, led by a

few landlords and urban intellectuals like lawyers or professors, had no "sense" of industry and very little sense of business, not withstanding the fact that there were a few capitalist Muslim groups like the Khojas or the Bohras of Bombay.

Pakistan meant the liberation of modernizing energies in the Muslim section of the Subcontinent's population. Soon after Partition, a new Muslim business and manufacturing class arose, partly due to its own abilities, partly to the deliberate help by the Government of Pakistan. The intentions of this business class, notably in ascending cities like the West Pakistani town of Lyallpur, but also in Dacca, Khulna or Chittagong, coincided with the wishes of the politicians, civil servants and army officers who had taken their image of a modern nation from the British example. The religious authorities gave their blessing, and hardly a case is known where Islamic divines objected to modern business practices. The Army wanted Pakistan to be strong, which also means economically and industrially strong. The Civil Service transferred its modern ideals from the British "Raj" (Rule) to the new State. Once Pakistan managed to "prime the pump" by attracting an influx of foreign capital from private and governmental sources (AID, Colombo Plan, World Bank, bilateral agreements with European governments and with Japan), an astounding economic development has taken place, — above all in West Pakistan and Karachi, but later on also in East Pakistan. The regime of President Ayub Khan has intensified the modernizing drive and the speed of economic advancement. Progress and more wealth seem to be as much part of the Islamic ideology of Pakistan as the Welfare State, Democracy and National Independence. A nation of soldiers, sages, officials, lawyers, professors, landowners and peasants has turned into a population of skilled workers, entrepreneurs, bankers and highly efficient business managers. This change is not done surreptitiously with a bad conscience, but consciously and deliberately as part of the Muslim drive for the Faithful to be again in the vanguard of civilization as they once were in the times of the great Arabic scholars or of the Moghul modernizers of India.

Democracy, independence and efficiency are the three ideals of Pakistan, approved by the nation's religious leaders, accepted by the masses, and proclaimed as achievements — as is the case in other nations — even when they are only the guiding principles of a blueprint for nation-building.

Anyhow, it is important enough to take note of a nation's claims. The national ambitions are a clue to the intentions at work within the social reality, although they are obviously not a faithful description of the real facts.

II

Not many foreign observers have carefully looked into the social realities of Pakistan. They either lack preparation and approach their subject without any previous knowledge of Indian history and of Islamic thought, or they are too cautious to state openly what causes them misgivings. Indian criticisms of Pakistan are vociferous, but lack credibility as long as the tension between the two nations lasts. Pakistani self-criticism is frequently muffled, either by the exertion of pressure or the fear of pressure, sometimes by tact or by an anxiety not to make the country's international position more difficult. However, within Pakistan, many people see the short-comings of their present state very clearly and eagerly discuss them among themselves, even see no shame in commenting upon them to visitors as long as they are sure of the visitors' general sympathy with their country and its people. Criticism of this nature can rarely be found in books, but quite frequently in newspapers and often in private conversations. It arises from a patriotic anxiety that the national reality may fall short of the national ideal. Criticism on that level is not meant to destroy, but to help.

There is first a comparison between the democratic professions and a social reality which Pakistanis themselves are inclined to misname "feudalistic". This word is a misnomer because it arouses thought associations with European Feudalism which are far from reality. What is meant by the term is an attitude of social irresponsibility shown by an economically powerful class and a social passivity practised by the masses, whereas historical Feudalism implied a network of mutual responsibilities and obligations. Be that as it may, the critics doubt that the democratic professions of a welfare society correspond to the social realities of modern Pakistan.

They point to rural conditions in which overpopulated villages work for absentee landlords and their local rent-gatherers. At election time, the peasants give their votes to the nominee of the landlord, under pressure from the rent-collector and the local police-

man. The old saying in the Punjab: "Allah is in Heaven, but the Patwari — the tax collector — is on Earth", still holds true in many villages. The farming communities are — in spite of community development or its Pakistani equivalent — cut off from the national life, they follow a traditional pattern of behaviour, are illiterate and fatalistic. The feudal system of former days has deteriorated into a "feudalistic" relationship in which all the duties are on one side and all the privileges on the other, in which the patriarchal union between landlord and serf has been replaced by an exploitative nexus between an absentee rentier and a share-cropping tenant. The much-advertised land reform laws have hardly scratched the surface of the problem. Ignorance and illness, under-employment and poverty prevail in the villages.

There are caste divisions in spite of all Muslim pretensions to the contrary. In the villages, caste brethren support each other against justice and even against the law. They afford patronage to each other when there is a job to be filled. Tensions between the old local groups and the incoming refugees from India have not been overcome during almost two decades of life in the same locality. Marriages follow strictly the caste pattern, and the police even ask for a person's caste in order to establish his identity.

The power elite are addressed as "Sahib", and servility prevails. The Sahibs of Pakistani origin often treat their inferiors with as little or less courtesy than was shown by the Imperial Rulers to the subject race. There is a vast, hapless servant population, which often permits itself to be bullied in order to retain its jobs.

All these phenomena may be remnants of feudal times, come down from the days of a rural oligarchy which had been supported by and had, on its part, maintained first the rule of the Moghul Emperors, then of the British Viceroys. But instead of dying out, the phenomena continue to exist and become more aggravating as the old landlord class becomes rich by investment in modern industry and business. The village labourer is turned into an urban proletarian. Karachi was filled, after 1947, with desolate, homeless refugees from India who could never hope to get a foothold on the land again and who have been pushed about ever since, from their shanty-towns out of sight into new housing estates on the verge of the desert without adequate amenities and without employment. Free trade unions in the modern sense do not exist,

only government-controlled boss unions. Pakistan experiences the evils of a quickly growing Capitalism in its early stages, as has any country in the world during a parallel stage of development. Uneducated, capitalist arrogance links itself with the remnants of feudal days, and the landowners invest in industry, enter management, marry their daughters to industrialists.

Thus, the critics can point to a system of social malaise which is far removed from the welfare state and from democracy. They also say that in spite of all professions Pakistan is not really independent. They remind their listeners of the fact that the ill-fortuned U-2 plane started from Peshawar and that Pakistan is far too dependent, in their view, on the United States. Furthermore, they say that this dependence has not helped Pakistan much as the United States, like Britain before them, are disinclined to offend India, no matter who the more loyal ally is and what his legitimate claims may be. The critics regret that Pakistan has allowed herself to be drawn into a US-sponsored alliance with the Iranian regime, the stability and the democratic character of which, in their eyes, are not beyond doubt. The link between CENTO and NATO causes misgivings, and SEATO appears to have only a shadowy reality unless it means an involvement in the unfortunate affairs of Vietnam. The critics voice a general uneasiness about the commitments into which Pakistan may have been drawn by its acceptance of military and economic aid from America. They fear that Pakistan may be counted a member of a "Western" bloc, although its people definitely do not feel an identity of interests with the "West".

As far as the claim for economic progressiveness is concerned, the critics count the price of economic progress. They see the one-sided preference granted to certain regions and certain economic pressure groups. They regret the lack of a social component in the economic advance.

They even doubt whether the picture drawn by statistics of economic development is a true counterpart to the live facts. They point to the general backwardness of Agriculture, by which the First Five Years' Plan was upset. They maintain that population increase still outdistances economic growth. They doubt whether the nation gains any economic advantage from the increase in the riches of the few. They see the terrific overhead caused by corruption and inefficiency, and above all, by over-bureaucratization.

In 1958, when the military took over, there was a general feeling of relief which lasted a little while. There seemed to be at least one instance to which one could complain about injustices and inefficiencies,—the Martial Law Authorities. But gradually, the officers are withdrawn from their civilian functions, and the old difficulties reappeared. Businesses and government offices are run with wasteful inefficiency. Business and professional morale is low. How can a nation's economic life flourish when the files of its own Accountant-General are carried away by the winds over the roofs of the capital city, when endless correspondence takes place over the most trivial official business, when many officials shirk responsibilities and always want to take shelter behind a stronger man's back, when the lesser ranks of administration are overstaffed and underpaid, when the police salaries are inadequate, when a squirearchy of the 18th century England-type sees to it that its nephews and cousins get promotion, when transactions are hampered by mistrust and when a complicated system of factual censorship muzzles not only every effective criticism of the regime but complaints about obvious failings within the regime which violate the regime's own principles?

Pakistanis are pleased to show the visible signs of their economic progress, but at the same time distressed at the unnecessary handicaps placed on progress.

They point to backwardness in fields which are not in themselves connected with economic activities, but which certainly may have economic implications. The rate of illiteracy and disease is still high. The intra-urban transportation system does not function properly. Municipal services do not work. The position of women is not as good as the leaders of the official women's organizations claim it to be. There is a problem of public security, and even the courts are not always beyond reproach.

In other words Pakistan suffers from all the growing pains of a transitional economy, and not all the powers that be are willing to admit it. Social scientists do not gain popularity with officials if, duty-bound, they point to problems in the body politic. In spite of all the detailed self-criticism, Pakistan has not attained what Comte called "the self-consciousness of a critical age".

III

Neither the eulogists nor the critics are absolutely right. It is exceedingly difficult to verify either thesis or counter-thesis, because field-work on such delicate problems meets obvious difficulties, quite apart from the methodological problems which would arise in any society. The former Village-AID ("Agricultural and Industrial Development") Organization, the Bureau of National Reconstruction, Boards of Economic Enquiry, the Central Statistical Office, the Institute of Development Economics, the Administrative Staff College, the National Institute of Public Administration, and a number of university research centres, in particular those of Lahore, Dacca, Rajshahi and Peshawar, have done quite a number of studies in which contributions towards a true assessment of the situation may be found. None of them has been able, up to now, to present an overall picture of the social reality. But all this work helps to correct either excessive praise or unjust criticism.

The main result of the studies done is that Pakistan is passing through a transitional phase. Things change very quickly, conditions vary from one locality to the next one, and within the same locality by economic status and age. On the whole, there can be no doubt that Pakistan is definitely on the road towards the fulfilment of her ideological claims, but it is also beyond question that she still has a very long way to go.

The leaders of Pakistan and many common citizens have grasped the fact that constitutional technicalities alone do not make the democratic character of a State, that the electoral process is not the only procedure to be watched, that parliamentary debates on the British pattern do not guarantee a democratic handling of the executive functions, that political democracy, even if it is practised remains a shadow if it is not based on social and economic justice, providing for an optimum of equality between all groups of the population.

The system of "Basic Democracies" has often been criticised as a mere device of electoral procedure, replacing direct by indirect elections and favouring the candidates who are professed friends of the government and the ruling groups. But the truth is that the elections held under the new Constitution were the first elections Pakistan has ever had on a national scale. The rule that the

local candidate should be a local man known to the electorate is inherently sensible. In some localities, the "Union Councils" which form the lowest tier of the Basic Democracies, fulfil the functions of a democratic local government body quite well. There are people in Pakistan who honestly believe that by instituting this system the country has started on the road towards real democracy.

Real democracy can only function if proper leaders come to the fore. Whereas neither the municipal organization nor the Community Development effort made during Village-AID days have succeeded in establishing genuine cadres of leading persons, the system of Basic Democracies has a better chance of achieving this end. Men of experience and a sense of their responsibilities have a chance of proving their worth to their fellow-citizens, and it seems not impossible that a democratically constituted class of political leaders may evolve.

But the crucial point is economic and social democracy. When the word Welfare State was suddenly thrown into the debate, during the early days of the Military Government, this was a symptom for the awakening of a social conscience. More and more Pakistanis realize that Democracy cannot flourish as long as there are the crass differences between rich and poor that prevail today. There are always a few news items, reporting that in this or that question the Government has, in some concrete dispute, sided with the people against the economically entrenched Power Elite. Sensitiveness to social injustice is sharpening. The poor need not always fear that they are left behind. Technical change gives the employees not only more self-confidence, but also more possibilities of making their wishes heard and if necessary felt. The people are less docile than formerly, and the "Sahibs" watch their steps more than before, they even realize that certain things ought not to be done.

A similar interpretation may be given to the second claim, the claim that Pakistan is genuinely independent. The independence in form is a fact, and the step from Governor-General's rule to President's rule was in Pakistan as symbolic as it is in many African Commonwealth countries. But the over-reliance on powerful allies was also a fact until quite recently.

A careful study of post-Partition history gives the impression that Pakistan was not created as a British puppet-state against India, but that the Pakistani leaders during the first years of the

nation's existence hoped that Britain might be willing to support the country of the "martial races" against the more turbulent India. When Pakistan's leaders found that they were mistaken in their hopes, as Britain could or would not act according to Pakistan's wishes, they turned to America. The first foreign minister of President Ayub's government, Mr. Manzoor Qadir, once said publicly that Pakistan in 1954 had badly needed an ally in order to safeguard her very existence, and that it was obviously necessary to pay a price for the protection thus gained. The difficulty only was that Pakistan, caught between a hostile India and a hostile Afghanistan, had no alternative but to rely heavily on the United States. Her heavy dependence was not of her own free will, but was forced upon her by circumstances.

The importance of the recently formed links with China is not only the fact of these relationships alone, but the winning of more maneuvering possibilities. As long as the Soviet Union openly supported India, Pakistan had no choice but to seek American help. The Sino-Indian tension, whatever its rights or wrongs may be, has provided Pakistan with a sudden change of breaking out of a seemingly closed circle. She has taken this chance and shown her friends and adversaries alike that she is unwilling to have her hands shackled when there is a chance to act.

The Kashmir question is important in itself, but perhaps even more important as an indicator of the two interested nations' international standing. For a long time, Pakistan's case was made light of, no matter what arguments were advanced. Many people in India still resented the very existence of an independent Pakistan, not merely its claim on Kashmir.

This position has changed abruptly with the fighting on the Sino-Indian border in 1962. Pakistan was suddenly "on the map", and it seemed definitely advisable at least to listen to her grievances. Independence, real independence, has increased by skilful handling of the Chinese negotiations. Now the world knows that Pakistan could take another road if she so chose and is not tied to America by the very threat for her bare existence.

It is easier to measure the rate of economic progress than the degrees in which democracy or independence have been achieved. Here undoubtedly the critics underestimate Pakistan's advance. Not merely the statistics speak for it, but also any first-hand view

of the country. There are many installations which were not there before. There are more motorcars and more telephones. Things are being produced which had to be imported formerly. Pakistan has assembled economic resources which can be tapped in the future for the sake of social justice. Her potential has increased so that social differentiation has taken place in a greater degree and that there is more to go around if the riches are to be shared.

Nor can there be any doubt about the efficiency of some services. The West Pakistan Railways function very well indeed, and Pakistan International Airways is a model aviation company. The Army certainly has increased its efficiency and its command of modern technology. The number of skilled workers is growing. Administration is being tightened, and new expert cadres are being systematically trained.

There is backwardness, certainly, but there is definitely a progressive aspect of Pakistani life. Any visitor realizes its blessings immediately if he returns from this or that neighbouring country to Pakistan.

During the transitional phase, when Pakistan is moving towards democracy, independence and efficiency, it is of vital interest that tensions are minimized and frictions avoided. Nevertheless, there are some critical points. The first one is the division between East and West Pakistan. The geographical distance of the two Wings of the one nation cannot be wiped out. But it is not sufficient to stress the unity of the political will. The major problem of Pakistani nation-building seems to be the establishment of social unity between East and West. Bengali sensitiveness and Punjabi sturdiness would complement each other very well, but one cannot rule the other. An East Pakistani Power Elite must gradually grow up to join forces with the rulers of West Pakistan, and both must see to it that social justice is provided for the masses.

The second problem is the relationship with neighbouring countries. Pakistan has succeeded in more or less settling the sterile quarrel with Afghanistan. As long, however, as the tension with India lasts, far too much money and energy must be spent on defence. True enough, a friendly cooperation with India cannot be achieved by Pakistan on her own, but the problem remains.

Finally, there is the necessity of a radical change of social attitudes among many members of the more powerful and richer

families of Pakistan. The concept and the reality of the "Sahibs" must go, by which the abolition of the traditions of courtesy and pride is definitely not meant.

Pakistan has experienced nearly two decades of a pioneering age, of a goldrush, of great opportunities for ruthless individuals. They have brought the nation forward. If President Ayub's government and the Islamic conscience now manage to instil a greater sense of charity and social responsibility in everybody, there is a chance that the critics may be misproved and that Pakistan may be on her way towards a greater degree of realization of her dreams.