

ISLAM AND POLITICAL POLICIES IN PAKISTAN

Reference to be provided by Prof. Khurshid

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ABSTRACT

“Let me come to the heart of the problem without much ado. Pakistan's predicament can be understood in the context of a counter-coup by the political elite to frustrate the fulfillment of the vision that inspired the Movement. Freedom was attained, and that was no mean achievement. But the fruits of freedom were usurped by the intermediary classes. Real transfer of power to the people was frustrated by usurpation of power by a coalition of vested interests that had no real role in the freedom struggle. This leadership had no commitment to Islam or democracy.

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I deem it an honor and a privilege to share with you some of my thoughts on Islam and political policies in Pakistan. This discussion is taking place in the context of pioneering efforts to build bridges between Islam and the West. I would like to place on record that we in the Islamic Movement welcome all such efforts as stepping stones toward promoting co-operation between the West and the Islamic Ummah. We firmly believe that it is only through dialogue that we can understand each other better, and explore avenues of co-operation and co-existence despite differences in our value perspectives or political and economic interests. It is a happy sign that instead of just talking about each other, we have entered a phase where we are talking to each other. We know what harm has been done to human society and civilization by isolationist as well as hegemonistic approaches, whatever be their form or colour. Differences in cultures, religions and ideologies are a fact of life. It is only realistic to accept pluralism, as the most viable framework for the human family; recognizing our differences as authentic, yet joining hands to face common challenges and tolerate and respect genuine differences.

Muslims had been the dominant power in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent for almost 900 years. The British seized power from the Muslims and during the colonial period brought out a number of fundamental changes, some positive and some extreme by negative for the society, polity and economy. When the freedom movement gained momentum in the context of this changed scenario, the overwhelming majority of the Muslims of the subcontinent came to the conclusion that if freedom means an opportunity to live according to one's values and principles, it could be achieved only if the subcontinent is divided in such a manner that the areas where Muslims constitute a majority should become an independent sovereign state. Muslims did not regard themselves as simply a minority; they regarded themselves as a nation based on its distinct faith, culture and history.

Pakistan was not a mere geographical expression. The struggle for freedom was inspired by the vision of a society and a destiny. It was an effort to acquire a territory so that vision of society could be translated into reality. This basis of Pakistan constituted a social contract between the leadership of the Pakistan movement and the Muslims of the subcontinent, whose support and sacrifice were prompted by this vision and commitment. Let it be clearly understood that

whatever be the afterthoughts of certain secular and Westernized intellectuals, the Muslim people of the subcontinent did not suffer from any confusion. Their vision was clear yesterday and today. Having said so, this painful fact has also to be acknowledged that despite certain remarkable achievements, the political leaderships after the death of the Quaid-e- Azam in September 1948, failed to fulfill the ideals that inspired the Pakistan movement. Consequently the country has passed through a series of crises during the last fifty years, including the separation of East Pakistan through Indian intervention in December 1971.

Let me come to the heart of the problem without much ado. Pakistan's predicament can be understood in the context of a counter-coup by the political elite to frustrate the fulfillment of the vision that inspired the Movement. Freedom was attained, and that was no mean achievement. But the fruits of freedom were usurped by the intermediary classes. Real transfer of power to the people was frustrated by usurpation of power by a coalition of vested interests that had no real role in the freedom struggle. This leadership had no commitment to Islam or democracy. It resorted to every category of undemocratic means to consolidate its own hold on power. It has also misused the resources of the country for its own benefits. Yes, it continued to pay lip-service to Islam, because this was the only way it could silence or deceive the people. Their deliberate effort was to impose the secular, westernized ideologies without realizing how detrimental that was to the vital interests of the Pakistani nation. In fact, they were not sincere even to the Western concepts of secularism, democracy, nationalism, capitalism and socialism, which they invoked from time to time to suit their convenience. This has generated an unceasing tussle and tension between the leadership and the people within the country. The people have wanted Islam, democracy and social justice. They want to see their country truly independent and self-reliant. They wanted to see their own culture and civilization flourish and to face the challenges of modernity by assimilating what was in harmony with the socio-cultural and moral framework of their society and culture and avoiding what was alien to it. The leadership, on the other hand, had its own agenda. There was also collaboration between local vested interests and external powers. This has given rise to very unique phenomena not only in Pakistan, but throughout the Muslim world.

Genuine democratization cannot but lead to Islamization of the society. Islam is not an external factor, it is something in which the people believe and regard it as their identity and destiny. As the leadership does not share this vision, it tried to

impose on the country a lifestyle that was at variance with the ideals and inspirations of the people and distasteful to their history and traditions. That is why political processes have been polluted by palace conspiracies, and military interventions. The first elected Constitutive Assembly was dissolved arbitrarily. It took nine years to frame the first constitution (1956) and within two years (1958), that Fundamental Law was torn to pieces, elections postponed and prospects of people's participation in the political process frustrated. The first elections were held after twenty-four years of independence (1970) and within the first year of these elections, the country was bifurcated. There had been four spells of military rule of different durations, resulting in some 23 years of direct military rule. Even the periods of civil rule were marred by despotism and arbitrary use of power. Failure to pursue Islamic policies and resort to despotic rule represent two sides of the same coin. That is why struggle for democracy and movement for Islamization have gone hand in hand, excepting the short spell of Zia regime, when the military leadership unsuccessfully tried to gain legitimacy by invoking Islam.

That represents one side of the story. A number of developments did take place, mostly under popular pressure, to give an Islamic identity to the country. Intellectual work on the nature of Islamic state, society and economy has been path-breaking. The Objectives Resolution, adopted by the Constituent Assembly in March 1949 has been the pace-setter. It has been accepted by the superior judiciary as the grand norm of the Pakistan state.

The Objectives Resolution has been included in all the three constitutions as their preamble and also as an operational part vides an amendment in 1985. The Qur'an and Sunnah have been accepted as primary source of law in the constitution and mechanisms (including Federal Shariah Court Islamic Advisory Council, International Islamic University, Commissions on Islamization of Economy and Education) created through which Islamization of laws and policies can take place. The directive principles of state policy as contained in the constitution provide a clear charter for an Islamic society and state. If these guidelines remain more as ideals and aspirations then factors influencing the actual policy, this is so because of the duplicity of the leaderships. It, however, deserves to be noted that under popular pressure, the character of the state, its ideals and guidelines have remained on the statute book.

Almost every political party has been claiming to stand for Islam and as such confusing the electorate. The struggle for democracy has been and is being spearheaded by the Islamic movement. The tragedy of democracy lies in the non-implementation of the constitution, arrogation of power by a coalition of feudal and capitalist classes and the civil and military bureaucracies and the absence of devolution of powers towards lower state structures and the people at the grassroots.

Most of the political parties did not practice democracy within their organizations. Hereditary politics is common, with the result that of a few hundred families hold monopoly over power. Energies of the state have been consumed in this tussle between the leadership and the people. Human and material resources could not be harnessed in the service of the ideals for which the country was created. Yet it is important to note that the people have continued to struggle against every move towards secularization and imposition of despotic rule. That is why every spell of despotism was followed by some kind of revival of democracy and reaffirmation of Islamic ideals. Nevertheless some of the unfortunate results of this can be seen in the continuation of poverty and deprivation, aggravation of economic injustices and inequalities, concentration of economic and political power, regional disparities and inequalities, neglect of education, health and social development, rise of ethnic and territorial conflicts, sectarian rivalries and discords, promotion of drug culture and increase in violence and lawlessness in society.

It is also important to note that the Islamic forces are committed to the democratic process and are opposed to resort to violence on political, religious and ethnic grounds. The acts of terrorism that have taken place do not represent any mass sectarian or ethnic divide. They represent the efforts of a few who succeed only because of the failure of the state machinery. The popular support enjoyed by the Milli Yakjehati Council (National Unity Council) is an index of people's abhorrence for this state of affairs.

Islam stands for the establishment of a just society based on the principles of Shura, respect for human rights, rule of law, independence of the judiciary, freedom of press, socio-economic justice and political and economic self-reliance. The basic contribution of Islam lies in inculcating in the human beings an ethical

attitude towards all aspects of life and society. Islam affirms both material and spiritual dimensions and aims at establishing a society that avoids the extremes of consumerism and regimentation and provides a healthy environment for the flowering of the best in the humans. Islam also respects the rights of the minorities and provides all human beings with opportunities for their development according to their faith, culture and values. The vision of an Islamic polity is pluralistic, within and at the global level. It is a tragedy that such an ideology is being looked upon or projected by certain quarters as a threat or an embodiment of terrorism. This is a serious distortion of reality.

Islamic resurgence represents the most important trend in contemporary Muslim world. This represents an effort to reaffirm the Ummah's identity as Islam and to carve out a future in conformity with these ideals and values. It is an effort to live in our own times with honor and dignity. The Muslim world is concerned about the hegemonistic and neo-colonial adventures of certain Western powers. This concern is prompted by their eagerness to preserve their identity and must not be construed as a threat to other cultures and civilizations. Islam stands for peace and justice and these are the foundations on which we all can build a better future for mankind.

The former American President, Richard Nixon, who in his earlier writings had expressed apprehensions about the so-called 'threat of Islamic fundamentalism' had come out with a more reasonable position in his last book, **"Beyond Peace"** There he comes very close to what Prince Charles has also emphasized as Islam and the West being 'partners in history' and not necessarily rivals.

I would like to conclude by suggesting that with such a positive attitude from the thinkers and policy-makers both from the West and the Islamic world, we can make this world a better place to live in for humanity, Let me conclude with a quotation from Mr. Nixon and hope we all may contribute towards the realization of this ideal:

"Though the West and the Muslims have profound differences in their cultural and historical development, we can learn from each other stating the reasons for our past successes and failures. The 20th century has been a period of conflict between the West and the

Muslim world. If we work together, we can make the 21st century not just a time of peace in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, but a century in which, beyond peace, two great civilizations will enrich each other and the rest of the world - not just by their arms and their wealth, but by the eternal appeal of their ideals"

(Richard Nixon, "Beyond Peace", pp.1 55-156)

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