

Pakistan: An Islamic State with a Secular Attitude

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ABSTRACT

An ideology leading to the creation of a state is a rare phenomenon in the polity of nations. Pakistan's model is a unique one in this regard. It is a synthesis of the western concept of statehood & the political philosophy of Islam. It is worth questioning as to whether the Pakistan movement was instilled with a typical religiosity, or whether it was a conscious development of political ideas that owed their emergence to a distinct sense of identity that the Muslims of India had, first as a community and then as a 'nation'.

This paper aims to explore the narrowly discussed aspects of the rare model of statehood that Pakistan presents. On one hand rests the ideological foundation of the state and on the other, lies the neutral (what could even be referred as 'secular') attitude of Pakistan since its inception. One would like to look into the causes of this balance which Pakistan, with all its ideological evolution, has still been able to maintain in its internal as well as in its international posture. The challenges confronted by ideological states to maintain such a balance, both on internal as well as external levels, are also important.

Internally, the cementing force of ideology that had united all the nationalities living within Pakistan is slowly chipping off. The country's sense of nationhood needs to be renewed by adding new perspectives so that a new direction can be given to the decaying sense of identity. On the external front, Pakistan's model fashions an intricate balance of dedication to ideology along with commitment to international responsibilities that highlights these challenges even more. After the events of September 11, 2001, our ideological outlook has been questioned once again. The oft-repeated assertion of Islam being the reason of Pakistan's creation can no longer be taken for granted. Pakistan's fulfillment of international responsibilities against terrorism (which involves pursuing those who fight in the name of religion) has compelled us to redefine where we, as an Islamic republic, stand in the generally secular state system and how we differ from a religiously driven movement.

It is difficult to comprehend the intricate balance that Pakistan fashions within its unique model; a balance that helps keep up both its ideological foundation and yet does not hinder its comfortable adjustment to the otherwise secular state system. This is not the case with other such states where religion or any other ideology has predominantly played an important role in orienting a state's posture. Why is it that a state like Pakistan, which was created for the safeguard of Muslim identity, was saved from turning into an overzealous entity? The answer to this question can be explored by looking into an interesting fact: the case for a separate Muslim state was pleaded in a court that did not consider religion to be one of the factors of the modern concept of nationhood, or for that matter, even statehood. It was naturally a difficult case as far as the evidence of Muslim nationhood was concerned. However, the practical conditions that the Muslims were subjected to gave them an argument to further their distinct interest articulation in the constitutional debates of Indian politics. There was no other choice but to assert their Muslim identity as a whole for the community. Though spread across the subcontinent, the Muslims felt endangered in a similar way. The deprivation of the rights of Muslims after the war of 1857 and the use of terms like 'fanatic' Mohammedan versus the 'mild' Hindu¹ sum up the difference in perception attached to each of them. This naturally effected the development of the two communities, leading to a typical difference in the needs and interests of Hindus and Muslims. It was for this reason that Sir Syed voiced his disagreement with the Indian National Congress and not because Muslims meant 'to retard the national progress of India or to prevent other people from enjoying rights for which they qualify'; but as long as there were 'different castes and creeds living in India' for whom 'it was impossible to become one nation, there could be no such thing as a 'National Congress'². He also could

¹ Ishtiaq Hussein Qureshi 'The Muslim community in South Asia' (B.C.C & T Press, University of Karachi:Krachi:2003), p.242

² Fazle Kareem ' Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reformer and First Protagonist of Muslim Nationalism' (Karcahi), p. 251

not imagine to 'run a rat race with persons with whom we have no chance of success.'

The difference in the 'interest articulation' of the Muslims compelled them to forge an alliance on the basis of a single Muslim identity. However, the resolve to recognize themselves as one NATION came; firstly because of their sheer numbers which could not be classified as a minority, and secondly due to the weightage of their role in India's affairs. This was voiced not just by Sir Syed but also by Ameer Ali. He succinctly voiced his argument for Muslim nationhood in an article published in an English journal '*The Nineteenth Century*' in August 1882 by saying that:

'A nation consisting of upwards of sixty millions of souls, with great traditions but without a career, deprived by slow degrees of wealth and influence by mistaken sentimentalism, mixed with contemptuous disregard for popular feelings, must always constitute an important factor in the administration of India.'³

The Muslim petition to the House of Commons regarding constitutional proposals in April 1890 emphasized on their sizable numbers as a community but added that 'we are dispersed throughout India among multitude of other races and castes inhabiting the continent' and therefore, in 'any system of election would be outvoted.'⁴ Their share in the various walks of national life along with their undeniable importance as one of the largest communities besides the Hindus that held an independent character was what led them to assert a distinct place for themselves.

A combination of mutual interests, shared fears, and a common desire for attaining a unique status in the future of India made the Muslims conscious of their nationalism. With an otherwise 'Muslim' identity the reasons for this national consciousness were quite pragmatic, or what can even be called secular in nature. Till this point one can clearly see the adoption of the western liberal democratic model in which the common

³ Ibid., p.253

⁴ Ibid. p.238

aspirations, common goals, a shared past and most importantly a shared vision of the future transforms a community into a 'nation'. Moreover the demands for representation in the constituent units of India were based on the liberal concept of an inclusive democracy wherein the rights of all communities and minorities are safeguarded. However, the ideological dimension to this political consciousness cannot be ignored. It would be a very deficient analysis were we to conclude that the constitutional demands that emerged as a result of the Muslims' sense of identity was nothing but a confirmation of the liberal concept of rights. The philosophy behind these demands was embedded in the ideological debates that brought about this national consciousness. It is here that we must give an equal importance to the Islamic conception of representation, which differs slightly from the liberal concept, and can be seen as the philosophical approach behind the demands of the all India Muslim League.

Farzana Sheikh has thrown considerable light over the argument of ideology influencing the political and constitutional demands of the Muslims. She explains the less-discussed 'dichotomies between Islam and western liberalism' that led to the distinct demands for Muslims' representation inside India. There are three points on which the Islamic concept of representation differs from the western liberal one. The first difference lies in the concept of 'unit of representation.' In the western system the individual and his interests form the main unit of representation; whereas in the political philosophy of Islam, societal and communal interests gain primacy. The western concept of individual equality being placed at the centre for all kinds of governance came as a result of the conflict between the Church and the aristocracy. In Islam however, the importance of Muslim community, its cohesion and defense of its entire fabric is what guides the principles of political governance. Therefore, Sheikh argues that the All India Muslim League's argument for being 'an exclusive community with exclusive interests' made the League

uncomfortable with the blind individual representation which would anyways outvote Muslim representatives.⁵⁶⁷

The second is the difference in perception of the western and Islamic philosophies over the idea of 'representativeness'. The liberal model follows the 'strictly electoral theory' of representation wherein 'political legitimacy is ordained to elected status.' In Islamic conception however, representation comes out of a clear affiliation and belonging to a certain community, especially in the case of a Muslim community. Hence, a non-Muslim member elected from a certain constituency will not be considered representative of the interests of the Muslim community; the eligibility for representing Muslims can only be fulfilled through Muslim representatives. This led especially to the demand for separate electorates made by the Muslim League on various occasions for reasons already mentioned. Here too the Islamic concept of representative status is what translated into a political demand for considering All India Muslim League to be the sole representative of the Muslims of India, as opposed to the Congress's claim for being representative of all the communities living inside India.

The third difference pointed by Ms Sheikh (although debatable) is the 'organization of representative bodies' between the two systems. In the liberal model of democracy, the representative body is a 'repository for the national consensus' which rotates its term periodically on the basis of 'elected political majorities'. Whereas, in the Islamic concept of representative bodies, the institution is the reflection of the actual composition of the society with clearly defined communal groups who 'aspire to representation within an evenly balanced political assembly'. From here she deduces the League's claim for exclusive representation of Muslims and its demand for parity to keep a constitutional

⁵Farzana Sheikh 'Muslims and Political Representation in colonial India: The Making of Pakistan' in Mushirul Hasan (ed.) *India's Partition: Process, strategy and Mobilization* (OUP: New Delhi:2001), p.83

⁶ Ibid., p.84

⁷ Ibid. p.86

check on the otherwise unrestrained power of the non-Muslim majority. She also traces the League's precaution of protecting the exclusive zone of its electorates from the infiltration of any person who was non representative of the Muslim electorate.

It is refreshing to see Ms Sheikh highlight the influence of ideology which is usually undermined as being a political card and nothing else. However, one has to be cautious for her explanation of ideological differences leading to distinct Muslim demands is influenced by the western interpretation of this issue. The more indigenous debates on the Muslim concept of state, politics and nationhood between Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Ameer Ali, Chiragh Ali, Shibli Nomani & Nawab Mohsinul Mulk, often disagreeing with one another on political conceptions are a much better reminder of the intellectual debate that continued on the Islamic perceptions of polity and state. Moreover, the counter-challenge from the orthodox institutes of Deoband, and the romanticists including Azad, Hakeem Ajmal Khan, Maulana Muhammad Ali, Maulana Shaukat Ali and Dr. Ansari helped create a Muslim renaissance in redefining ideological directions of the Muslims' approach to politics.⁸

In all of these intellectual discussions Islamic conceptions did not hinder but infact advocated the cause of equal rights which could only be sought with an adherence to the liberal democratic institutions of the West. Hence, the movement for securing rights for the Muslim community backed by an ideological development of the unique Muslim representation in liberal institutions culminated into a consciousness that did not let religiosity color the political struggle of the Muslims of India. So much so that even the two-nation theory is both secular and ideological at the same time. Hence, the process of transformation from a community into a nation represents a unique balance of ideology and interest articulation for the Muslims of India.

How was this balance extended to the state of Pakistan? The sovereignty clause laid down in the Objectives Resolution

⁸ See Linis May's ' Evolution of Muslim Political thought' for an in-depth study

presented in March 1949 embodies within itself the synthesis of ideology and liberal democracy when it claims 'sovereignty rests with God' but that 'the authority is to be exercised by the people of Pakistan within the limits prescribed by Him as a sacred trust'. Liaquat Ali Khan, the architect of the Objectives Resolution clarified the concept of Islamic democracy that 'it should be through the will of the people as expressed through their chosen representatives.' He defended his insertion of sovereignty laying in the hands of God, 'so that it does not become an agency for tyranny or selfishness.' In order to dispel the fears of certain members of the constituent assembly Liaquat Ali Khan asserted that:

"Sir, I just now said that the people are the real recipients of power. This naturally eliminates any danger of the establishment of a theocracy ... If there are any who still use the word theocracy in the same breath as the polity of Pakistan; they are either laboring under a grave misapprehension, or indulging in mischievous propaganda."⁹

Hence, the clear cut denunciation of theocracy not just by the Prime Minister but also by all the Muslim members of the constituent assembly ensured that the character of the Islamic republic remains democratic in nature and blocked the way for any religious bigot to hijack the interpretation of Pakistan.

How well did Pakistan fare in up keeping this synthesis of ideology and liberal democracy? After surmounting the successful acquisition of nationhood, statehood, which of the elements went missing? Many have blamed ideology to have failed in cementing the ties between the various nationalities living within Pakistan. However, one has to question as to how ideology could have been furthered amongst the people of Pakistan once the creation of an independent state was achieved. The intellectual debates between Muslim scholars over the concept of governance in Islamic society had envisioned a society that would be based on 'social equality,

⁹ Sharif al Mujahid 'Liaquat and the Objectives Resolution' *Dawn* (Karachi) October 16, 2006.

social justice, tolerance and respect for other's opinion.'¹⁰ All of these are again elements espoused by the secular liberal model and are dependent on a responsible articulation of interests.

Yet the areas where Pakistan was formed, comprised of a system where 'the peasant did not have the right to mould his life according to Islamic social order and the feudal did not accept Islamic social order.'¹¹The immigrant middle class that came remained indifferent and did not play its political role that could have emancipated the 'fellow Muslims' of their own country.¹² One betrayal after the other by vested interest groups and the indifference shown by those who could have channelized the interests of the society on the right track led to a total estrangement with the ideology of Pakistan. The current crisis in Swat and Waziristan where militancy has sporadically spread are two cases in point wherein the militant leaders have called for an enforcement of Sharia law. The demand for Sharia law reflects the demand for the Islamic conception of equality, fast and speedy justice, provision of employment and other rights that the state has been unable to deliver. The people had hopes that the state of Pakistan would promote an environment of interest articulation that would help develop an Islamic society through spread of social justice. More dangerous than the militancy are the fault lines that are emerging due to a lack of deliverance on part of the state. The militancy is simply a sign of hopelessness due to the delayed steps of the government to translate the vision over which the Muslims formed this state.

Again, one has to question if it was really the ideology that failed to cement cohesion among Pakistanis or was it instead the lack of political training and discipline¹³ that led to an unbridled misuse of power by the ruling class. The pragmatic steps needed to translate this ideology into social justice and social cohesion were

¹⁰ Ghulam Kibria 'Pre- Independence Indian Muslim Mindset' (Karachi:2001), p. 103

¹¹ Ibid. p.105

¹² Ibid. p.155

¹³Ibid.

missing from the scene. As far as the exclusive role of ideology is concerned, one finds that the intellectual debates that preceded the creation of Pakistan came to a complete standstill once the state was secured. The names of a number of Muslim intellectuals as earlier spelt out were responsible for discussing and debating the future directions of the Muslim community of India. Then why was there a complete vacancy in the intellectual slot after the establishment of Pakistan? After its creation, the past ideological framework was shelved as a fantasy and nostalgia for the coming generations. Its framework was not used to build upon and add new perspectives to it for developing a renewed vision for what should now have been termed as 'Pakistani nationalism'. Why wasn't the concept of Pakistani nationalism theorized to give the newly formed nation a new sense of purpose? Why weren't the aims and objectives of the new society discussed, debated? Why had we killed our imaginative faculties to espouse a new role in a changing world for this young aspiring state? Why wasn't there any intellectual like Iqbal, Ameer Ali or Rehmat Ali who could assert the future course of action and explore the potential dynamism of this new ideological republic that had carved a place for itself with the thrust of ideology and the vehicle of liberal democracy?

Finally, Pakistan's posture in the world after 9/11 has been of a peculiar nature. On the one hand the West compliments Pakistan for its cooperation in the war against terror while on the other hand Pakistan is suspiciously viewed for its Islamic identity and alleged links with the Muslim extremists. In the prevailing war on terror, how do we present ourselves, as an ideological state, or as a secular state? Will assertion of ideology be taken in the West as a form of extremism? How should Pakistan differ itself in this realm of a largely secular community of nations and yet stick to Jinnah's vision. Today the need to reinterpret the secular aspects of the Islamic republic and the balance it fashions within itself is more than ever. The fears that the West holds for a resurgent Islam or for that matter any political philosophy that is related to Islam can be dispelled if shown a model that can espouse a liberal concept of democracy with an interest articulation that furthers the

Islamic perceptions of society. Already a debate needs to be initiated as to how the liberal concept of democracy will be incorporated in societies that are not homogenous; a critical feature for the assumption of the western model of democracy.

One could argue that in the prevailing atmosphere of vulnerability within Muslim polities and especially within Pakistan, should we stick to ideology or do away with it? Should we become apologetic over it and instead focus on the secular side alone. The answer to this question lies in questioning the conscience and the will of the society, an exercise akin to the liberal model as well. As rational scholars a true appraisal of interest articulation, domestically as well as internationally, is vital for rescuing ourselves from this situation. But can Pakistan afford to abandon ideology in this reappraisal by calling it a mental baggage of the past? This paper would argue that that would hurt the process of interest articulation in Pakistani society and create an internal strife similar to that of Turkey.

As intellectuals we cannot ignore the existing trends in the Pakistani youth. The absence of genuine interest articulation and the emptiness of a sense of direction have created a vacuum for the youth of Pakistan in particular and the Muslims in general. One can see a resurgence of religious zealotry that has easily filled up this vacuum. Can we allow our youth to be trapped into the revisionist or radical pits of religiosity? Can Jinnah's vision for Pakistan save the youth from ultimate disaster? This research would conclude that it is necessary to rescue our youth from this radicalism but caution must be taken in not forcing them to become apologists. The much needed balance can be developed by building upon the ideological framework of the past Muslim intellectuals with focus being placed on a future sense of direction. This future vision for the Islamic republic must necessarily be ensconced with the secular principles of democracy and social justice without which any renewal of ideology would only lead to an ill directed revisionism.