

Part 1: FIRE

Chapter 1: Identity

The conflict between India and Pakistan is ultimately about identity. It is about who we are and who we want to be as people. On the surface it appears to be a conflict about what we want to have - water, or land or whatever else. The reason why we are not able to reach a negotiated agreement on sharing what we want is because we confuse what we want to have with what we want to be.

There are conflicts in our mind about where we come from, what we form as respective societies and where we want to reach. India and Pakistan in their present forms are post-colonial states. Nevertheless, to most Indians, India is not a state, but a civilization one that predates the arrival of not only the British and the Mughals, but also the Aryans. The Indians trace the birth of civilization to approx 2500 BC, when King Bharat reigned; even though there is a dispute about prehistoric dates. Some Pakistanis trace the birth of their nation not only to the Lahore Resolution of 1940, but also to the landing of Muhammad Bin Qasim in Sindh and Multan in 712 AD.

Pakistan's Problems

If Pakistan is to be defined as a concept that was born with Muhammad Bin Qasim's conquest of Sindh, it is then intrinsically associated with foreign forces. On the other hand, if Pakistan is to be defined as a product of the Lahore Resolution and the partition of 1947, it is then associated with indigenous protest. The difficulties of the Pakistani mind to harmonize with India reflect the psychological tussle between a concept associated with foreign conquest and a concept demonstrating local protest. Therefore, the Pakistani mind is constantly trying to conquer and protest. The final settlement for the Pakistani elite is the victory of Pakistan over the entire land mass and population that Indians claim to form the Indian civilization. Until such a conquest is realized, a struggle is deemed to be essential to actualise the concept of protest.

Thus the conflict with India is a testament to existential crises. It is about continued existence of Pakistan as a notion, as an idea, as an identity of people who want to protest against the local culture. It is not about land, water, trade routes, finance and such material elements. It is also not about religion or majority-minority relations in the subcontinent. It is about power and resistance to power.

Pakistan was created in the name of Islam. However, the support for the Pakistan movement was confined to parts of Punjab, Bengal and United Provinces. There was no enthusiasm for the concept of a religion-based state in Sindh, Balochistan, NWFP, and Southern India. Presently, there are more Muslims living in India than in Pakistan.

The conquest of Mohammed Bin Qasim, and other Muslim rulers, particularly the Mughal dynasties, made it possible for the Muslim elite to rule the subcontinent. The creation of Pakistan made it possible for a conglomeration of Muslim landlords to rule a part of the subcontinent, though 300 million Muslims have chosen to not belong to the Pakistani state. About half of them chose to live in India. Another 150 million Muslims broke away from Pakistan to live in Bangladesh, which is a state formed on the basis of linguistic nationalism and not religion. About 150 million Muslims of the subcontinent currently live in Pakistan, though it may be speculated that some of them may prefer linguistic or ethnic nationalism as the basis for formation of new states in the decades to come.

The choice made by two thirds of the subcontinent's Muslims in support of coexistence or linguistic or ethnic nationalism, proves that there is no great psychological divide on the basis of religion. There are undoubtedly cultural and economic differences between different religious communities. There is enough historical evidence to prove that vested interests manipulate these differences to produce communal tension. The coexistence of differences with a desire for peaceful cohabitation challenges the concept of a state based on religious ideology. Therefore, the Pakistani elite constantly needs to justify the need for their state in the form of protests against the Indian civilization, currently represented by the Indian state. To them there will be no final settlement until they conquer or until they realize that Pakistan as a state can thrive as a vehicle for progress and not protest.

Should the Pakistani elite determine to perceive its state as a vehicle of progress for all its people, a final settlement with India will not only be feasible, but also beneficial. In 1995, J.N. Dixit, who as the former Foreign Secretary represented the quintessential Indian establishment, announced on the platform of International Centre for Peace Initiatives (ICPI), that the Indian elite had accepted the consolidation of Pakistan as a modern state in its own right and respected its evolution over five decades. In 1999, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, leader of the Hindu nationalist political forces, visited Pakistan as the head of the Indian government. He paid tributes at Minar-e-Pakistan in Lahore to symbolize the respect accorded by the Indian people to the concept of the Pakistani State. Gone are the days when a segment of Indian political thought questioned the partition. The dramatic proclamation by late Mr. J.N. Dixit in Mumbai in 1995, Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to Minar-e-Pakistan in 1999 and several other gestures demonstrate that India treats Pakistan as any other sovereign state. As pointed out elsewhere, even extremist Hindu leaders respect the sovereignty of Pakistan, though they accuse it of using terrorism to undermine the sovereignty of India. There is a fringe element among Hindu nationalist groups that propagate the concept of 'Akhanda Bharat'. Many Pakistanis construe this as a desire of Indian extremists to colonise Pakistan. In reality, the advocates of this theory espouse democratic confederation, not colonisation. In any case, they include a confused bunch of individuals ranging from romantics to armchair theorists.

There is a growing tendency in Pakistan itself to try to seek a self-generated identity and not as a protest movement against India. An increasing number of young people want Pakistan to be integrated in the world economy. Some would like to see Pakistan as part of the global Islamic community. A few have tried to define Pakistan as a part of greater Central Asia. In the 1950s, the Pakistani elite made a serious effort to form a confederation with Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Pakistan has not given up its obsession with India. If India claims permanent membership of the UN Security Council, Pakistan objects. If India seeks a role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Pakistan protests. It often appears that Pakistan is more interested in India's loss than its own gains. This is a psychological problem that needs to be diagnosed and cured in terms of human psychology, and not in terms of any piece of territory.

Pakistan's identity crisis poses the greatest stumbling block to the final settlement between Pakistan and India. It has become complex in the last 20 years because of a new yearning to define the national identity in a religious framework. There is growing contest between the forces of social modernism and religious orthodoxy. The ruling establishment has been playing with rival tendencies to entrench itself in the power structure. In the process the State has been going through transformation. In the 1950s it was a bureaucratic state. From the 1960s to the 1990s, it was a military dominated state. Since the 1990s, the military and the mullahs have been competing and collaborating with each other to determine the shape of the state. As of 2005, the military has an upper hand over the jihadi groups. If present trends continue, it is quite possible that religious orthodoxy will become a dominant force with the military playing a secondary role, unless the forces of social modernism manage to prevail.

In the dynamics of simultaneous competition and collaboration between the military and the mullahs, an uneasy relationship with India is essential. If there is peace with India, it is not possible to use the enemy card to galvanise the military or the mullahs. If there is total confrontation with India, it is not possible to use normalization process as a tool in the internal power game. The final settlement and the final confrontation are equally inconvenient. So long as Pakistan is engaged in a struggle to define its identity, it would be extremely handy to have India as an enemy.

Indian Identity

India does not have existential problems. India is clear that it wants to be a plural and secular democracy. It has had a stable constitution since its independence. Many of the constitutional changes, such as the Panchayat Bill have resulted in the deepening of democracy. Over the last 55 years, the electoral process has led to the sharing of power with backward castes and minority communities. India has problems of corruption, crime and conflict. There are groups that reject the social and political ethos of the country. Nevertheless, there is sufficient consensus on the plural, secular and democratic character of the country.

While India has a clear identity as a nation, it is striving to define its role in the world. On the one hand, India aspires a global role. On the other, India often thinks and behaves as a power concerned with regional dominance. It appears that India is simultaneously trying to be a frog in the pond and the lion of its national emblem. India's conflict with Pakistan is, to a certain extent, a product of India's struggle to find space in the world from two opposite directions. If India is serious about a place at the high table, Pakistan should not be an issue. It should be possible for India to carry Pakistan and other neighbouring countries in South Asia along as its closest allies. For instance, India should have been able to

establish a relationship with Pakistan such as the one that the US has with Canada, Britain with Ireland or France and Germany with Benelux. Such an equation would mean generosity on the part of India but without equal reciprocation. From time to time, India has been able to have dependable partnerships with Nepal and Sri Lanka, and even Bangladesh. It should have been possible to forge close economic and cultural linkages with Pakistan as well, since the 1950s by offering huge concessions. These could in turn have paved the way for strategic understanding. At least the Simla Agreement of 1972 could have been used to foster real friendship. The history of India-Pakistan relations is a case of missed opportunities.

If India is serious about being a lion with four heads that looks around in all directions with supreme confidence, it should be aspiring to negotiate the formulation of global political and economic structures. It should be engaged with G8 and P5 in efforts to determine rules of the game for the conduct of international relations. Instead, Indian leaders have approached great powers to protest against Pakistan sponsored acts of terror. On many occasions, India's discussions with the US, EU and Japan have been dominated by the concerns of others about India-Pakistan confrontation rather than India's concerns about global political and economic imbalances.

India's difficulties with Pakistan are the result of a failure to define a clear strategic vision and pursue it vigorously. If indeed this vision were to be global, India would need to expand its asset base. The primary component of such an asset base has to be a thriving economy and advancing technology. The secondary component has to be a genuinely cordial relationship with all the neighbouring countries. If India has an economic union with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, it would be a strong force by virtue of control over energy routes and proximity to China and Russia. Every great power in the world would want to deal with a country whose political orbit extends from the Caspian to the Asean. Instead of thinking in these terms, India has wasted far too much of its energy in managing an adversarial relationship with Pakistan. If India wants to make a U-turn now, it will only be possible with a new mindset and a new vision.

Conceptual Confusion

The problems of identity are not confined to the national level. Some Kashmiris agitate in the name of Kashmiriyat. Some project Kashmiriyat subservient to a militant religious identity. The Balochis have sought independence in the name of Balochi identity. Myriad groups from Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan and North-east India struggle to establish tribal identities. Across South Asia, at least ten major religions and sects are practised and over 200 languages spoken. If local administrative units are created in federal political structures, they can facilitate cultural expression and governance. However, if every entity is to be granted independent statehood, South Asia will become home to 200 states, equivalent to the current membership of the United Nations.

More important, a state based on religious or ethnic identity begs a moral question. On the surface, such a state is meant to accommodate a distinct identity. Beneath the surface, the demand for an independent state represents a combination of grievances and greed. Mohammed Ali Jinnah demanded Pakistan only when he realised that he could not head the government of united India. Shaikh Mujibur Rehman insisted on Bangladesh when he was not allowed to assume the highest elected office in Pakistan. Jagjitsingh Chauhan was happy with Punjab so long as he was a senior cabinet minister. When he could not become the Chief Minister, he advocated Khalistan. The partition of nation states as a means to pander to the greed of power-hungry men can never end since greed is insatiable.

India was partitioned in 1947. Pakistan was further split in 1971. Since 2001, a demand for even a further break-up of Pakistan has been gradually building up, with Sindhi and Balochi leaders agitating for cessation in certain situations. A fresh partition of Pakistan would not be the end of the story. In Sindh, there are overt conflicts between Sindhi and Mohajir communities and a strong resentment against Punjabi domination of the state and Punjabi settlers in the Sindh province. In Punjab, there are conflicts between Seraikis and Punjabis. In Balochistan, there are conflicts between tribals and Punjabi migrants. If an independent state is to be created for each community on religious, ethnic or linguistic basis, there will be perpetual demands for separation.

The case of Jammu & Kashmir most aptly illustrates the futility of power-sharing on ethnic or religious basis. Currently, the state of Jammu & Kashmir on the Indian side is a plural entity. If it were made a separate state, it would have to be divided into several parts. In each part, there would be areas dominated by a community that is in minority in the overall part. For instance, Hindus are a minority in the overall state, but they are in majority in the Jammu division.

In the Hindu-dominated Jammu, districts such as Rajouri and Poonch have Muslim-dominated population. Within Rajouri and Poonch, there are Hindu-dominated tehsils and villages. The part of Jammu & Kashmir on the Pakistani side is dominated by Sunni Muslims. Within this part, Shi'as and Ismailis dominate Gilgit-Baltistan. Within the Shi'a-dominated Gilgit-Baltistan, there are Sunni-dominated tehsils and villages. Thus, if religion or ethnicity is to be used as the basis of state formation in Jammu & Kashmir, the process of division will go on for a hundred years or more, until every tehsil becomes an independent republic. This would not be in harmony with the Kashmiriyat that advocates plurality and peaceful coexistence.

The theory of power-sharing as the basis for division of societies, stands on the flawed assumption that the countries, which are presently facing ethnic or other sectarian conflicts, are unbridgeably divided on religious or sectarian lines. The truth is that each of the strife-torn societies in the world has had periods of harmony of hundreds of years and it is only in the last few decades that they have been engaged in deadly conflicts. The subcontinent was divided into kingdoms until the British arrived. There were several wars between emperors and princes of the same religious pursuits, but they never extended to violence between segments of the society. The conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, Punjabis and Sindhis, Sindhis and Mohajirs, Assamese and Bengalis, Sinhalese and Tamils, Bamas and Karens, Nagas and Manipuris for power over structures of state are all a twentieth century phenomena.

Since identity is transient and can be manipulated, it cannot be the ideological basis of a durable state. Rather it can be the basis of a perpetual conflict. At the same time, redefining of identity can be the basis of harmony and progress. The question before India and Pakistan is whether they want the identity to be based on partitions and divisions or on unity in diversity. It is healthy to organise administrative units on a linguistic basis to preserve cultural independence within a federal unit. It is destructive to use religion, ethnicity and language as the ideology for independent countries. For a thousand years, Europeans fought with each other on the basis of religion and ideology. At the end of the second millennium, they realised the value of a model that provides cultural autonomy but political unity. The sectarian conflicts in South Asia are less than a hundred years old. It is to be hoped that we do not experience massive bloodshed and death to reach similar conclusions.

The final settlement between India and Pakistan must therefore be a settlement between the principles of cultural identity and political unity. It must be a settlement that allows expression and cohabitation of ethos creating a larger ethos of peace in the region. Robert Cooper says in *The Breaking of Nations* very aptly: "To find permanent solutions, we may need to think in terms of redefining identity. Only if a wider identity can be developed, will there be a chance of constructing the kind of community that may enable us to be with each other without a war."