

Epilogue

There is perhaps nothing profoundly new that I have pro-
pounded in this book. Many of the ideas have been float-
ing around since long; many others have been tried in
crude and fragmented forms. These days there are ran-
dom voices in the press and around social gatherings calling for
subdivision of provinces, presidential form of government, pro-
portional representation for election process and rescission of
specific theological injunctions like the Hudood Ordinance.
While many people may empathise with such views, they are
not taken seriously from a practical standpoint; just interesting
and hypothetical material for making after dinner conversation
lively.

There is a paradox in Pakistan's social ethos: In private and
individually it is the most liberal and tolerant culture but collec-
tively, on public front, it is rigid and inflexible to the extreme. In
rhetoric, it can cross every barrier yet in action, the society is
paralysed. The paradox reflects starkly in vernacular poetry,
literature, music, social deviations of the youth and in political
dogmatism. Every society has a parallax between professed val-
ues and practical actions to an extent but in Pakistan, there is a
convenient divorce between the two. Hypocrisy is a misnomer
for this state of mind. If there is a conscious action to circumvent
accepted societal values, it is hypocrisy. Here, the society defines

values clearly in two separate domains; those that are professed publicly and those that are complied with practically. When people, conditioned to socially sanctified dichotomy of words and actions, live a bipolar existence they are not being perfidious; they are being loyal to both dictates that the society has adopted.

The Pakistani politicians have exploited this peculiarity to the hilt. They have turned superlative jargon and ideological hyperbole into a litmus test of nationalism and Muslim identity, while in private their Machiavellian manoeuvres have been baptised as political savvy. No one can raise a finger at the 'emperor's new clothes'. Children are gagged when they try to say that the king is naked. For a culturally matured, instinctively sharp and politically aware nation, this intellectual paralysis is baffling from an independent and objective viewpoint. Two major historical factors can explain this phenomenon.

First is the scholastic tradition in Islam that developed through re-interpretations of past knowledge rather than innovation and invention of thought. The unwritten confines of remaining within the intellectual outlines passed down by ancestry stifled new philosophical thought, and scholars merely garnished old thought with new interpretations and theological metaphors. From Imam al-Ghazali until this day, Islamic scholasticism (*Ilm-e-Kalaam*) has followed a unitary path of thought – to refute other philosophies and to prove logically the superiority of Islam as the ultimate, divine truth on every aspect of life. The absolute submission to ancestral doctrines in scholasticism has manifested in a phenomenon of 'ancestor worship' in secular life. The respect and devotion of ancestors is taken to the extreme in everyday life; questioning ancestral wisdom is a social taboo. This legacy of theology transmutes into temporal politics and social values. Hence, precedence becomes immutable. Since

realities cannot sustain such inflexibility through changing times, deviation in practice becomes an existential necessity. Because intellectual precedence is unalterable, practical reality is divorced from professed ideals. Verbal homage is paid to ideals while pragmatic solutions hold sway in practice. People have developed a genius for coexisting with God and the Devil simultaneously in great comfort.

The second factor is myopia as a product of historical experience in the decades before independence. The existential situation for Muslims of the subcontinent was traumatic in the period beginning from 1858 until partition. They were born with a grand cultural and political heritage of over a thousand years of global supremacy. They had ruled India for over 700 years unchallenged, which had nurtured a great sense of racial superiority. After the fall of the Mogul Empire, that supremacy was eroded by the rise of Hindu economic ascendancy and British colonial rule. Muslim aristocracy was reduced to symbolic remnants of its past. Real power had drained out of its ranks. In trying to compromise reality with inherited self-image, Muslims had to find a new identity based on human rights, not even as equals but as a handicapped community. The uncertainty and terror that must have chilled their bones is hard to imagine for us as the post-partition generation. I have sensed the goose pimples on the soul of my elder generation as a sensitive child and as an avid observer subsequently. It is an established psychological phenomenon that a frightened man has no sense of the long term; his attention is focussed on the immediate escape from terror. Myopia becomes a second nature since all faculties are required to cope with the present. Future considerations are unaffordable luxuries.

Something of that nature happened to the generation that struggled, sacrificed and fought for a separate homeland of

Muslims in India. Having achieved their goal, the characteristics required for building a nation were quite different from the ones that created it. And those were not there! Myopia has become an endemic flaw of the nation. Long-term vision is conspicuous by its very absence. Economists and social reformers have been crying hoarse for a long-term vision but the planners and rulers have always kept the short term in view. We have ignored long term for so long now that even short-term solutions are not viable. Pakistan is joining ranks of basket cases of the world in terms of Human Development Index (HDI). It has the slowest growth rate in South and South East Asia during the past decade. The phantoms of drugs and terrorism from the past are casting deep shadows into the future. External threats (some of them self-created) are bearing hard upon internal fragility. There is a danger that the country might implode, if it does not radically reposition itself within the next few years.

There is another legacy from theological thinking habits that the society and the opinion makers fall prey to, which is not to believe in anything unless it is comprehensive and perfect, like religion. In temporal matters this habit inverts the relationship between belief and reality; a completeness and perfection is attributed to the prevalent beliefs even if it is not there, which invariably is not. Any new idea is rejected because it is not complete or flawless. Whereas a scientific outlook believes in piecemeal development of knowledge, theological mindset seeks a perfection-package. Parliamentary form of democracy has occupied the status of a comprehensive and perfect 'system' in Pakistan's polity. Proposals for seeking better alternatives are rejected at the hypothetical level because of this fixation with the 'familiar tradition'.

I am prepared to face considerable criticism for my proposals, much of it based on lack of perfection and completeness.

However, I base my case on the submission that a presidential system will have fewer flaws than the current parliamentary system and neither of them is perfect, as I have shown in previous chapters through historical references. We have to reform our political system and build it progressively, brick by brick, and not foster false hopes of acquiring a perfect system from somewhere, someday.

The reformation has to begin with discarding redundant baggage of the past (instead of seeking refuge in it) and starting afresh. I have broadened the canvas by dragging in psychological, social and historical demons but they haunt all petty details of material life of a society. Constitution is the vision and mission statement of a nation without which the community is a rudderless boat. This book is an attempt to wake us up from the slumber of past inertia and take our destiny in our own hands, pragmatically, rationally and with compassion for the teeming millions whose future is fast evaporating into the follies of our past mistakes.