

FUTURE POLITICS, AS IT SHOULD BE

Safdar Hasan Siddiqi
(31 Jul 2007)

At the very outset, it would be appropriate to consider the importance of the worldly life which we deal with in our everyday living. Most of us perhaps do not think about it as seriously as necessary. People just grow up in childhood under the protection and care of their parents, get educated, acquire some skill and then enter upon a life of their own, get married and start tackling their personal affairs and those of their offspring. They take things easy except when they are faced with some adverse circumstances. Whether they enter business or join a service or adopt politics seriously, in all these dealings their approach is more or less practical and pertains mainly to worldly affairs. They perceive these things, apply their minds and act to resolve them. In all this process they generally do not feel the need to ponder the ultimate aim and end-purpose of their lives. But there is something inherent in man that impels him to meditate when, apart from material needs, the higher and spiritual aspects of human relationship attract his attention and he is obliged to respond. Man is composed of both his material self and his spiritual being which, indeed, is the driving force that propels him to perform, both intellectually and physically, and enables him to have a good life in the hereafter.

Having presented this factual scenario we now proceed to discuss politics. Politics, essentially, is the art of social construction. Its basic requirement is the establishment of a collective setup, in the name of the State, for managing the society in a peaceful atmosphere and bringing improvement in it. The State is controlled by the Constitution, which is framed through a consensus among the political parties represented in the Parliament.

The State consists of three basic institutions – the Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary. The underlying mechanism for all these institutions is indulgence in most intense and widest consultation before making important decisions. The institution of media is there to keep an eye upon the activities of these major

institutions which must work to ensure the needs and rights of the mass of the people.

The Parliament consists of representatives of the people elected through free, fair and transparent periodic elections, held by a fully independent Election Commission having the essential legal powers and independent finances with a clear mandate for peaceful transfer of state-power to the majority group. Only those persons should be elected as members of the Parliament and the provincial assemblies whose honesty and sincerity is proved by their excellent record of public service, who are not defaulters in tax payments and are not convicted of a criminal offence. The members of the Senate should also be elected directly and not indirectly through nominations by political parties on the basis of their strength in the electoral college.

Another necessary requirement for the holding of fair elections is that the society is free from the pernicious influence of feudalism and absentee landlordism. The industrial workers should be made partners in industry and the landless peasants made owners of a minimum of 12 ½ acres of agricultural land per family.

The Executive should be made up of capable and honest persons and be made absolutely free from any outside pressure of vested interests. A separate Executive Accountability Commission should be set up for hearing complaints of bribery or non-performance against them. Ministers should only be taken in the Cabinet from both houses of Parliament on account of their ability and honesty, and their number should be restricted. Advisors are a heavy burden on the exchequer and should, therefore be done away with. Instead any necessary advice could be sought from bona fide experts in the various fields when required. The number of ministries should also be limited and not extended unnecessarily, and the departments under each ministry should not be excessively increased. Non-productive expenditure should be curtailed to the minimum so that maximum finance is available for productive purposes. Military expenditure should be reduced substantially in the interest of peaceful co-existence with our neighbours. Further, a peoples' army should be set up by training all able-bodied men to assist the army in times of emergency. The primary work of the executive should be extending service to the people rather than putting hurdles in their way.

The Judiciary is the mainstay for providing speedy and cheap justice to the needy, and for overseeing effective law-and-order machinery. Its main job is to safeguard the Constitution and prevent incursions in it by the Executive. In view of the enormous task assigned to the Judiciary it is incumbent that the appointment of judges should be done by the Parliament; it should not be left to the will of the President or the Prime Minister.

The orientation of the media should be to make objective assessments and facilitate the people in leading an easy and productive life and promoting democratic behaviour. This can only be done if the media itself is equipped with ideological clarity and a true understanding of the role of the state in nation building. The role of the media is pivotal in educating the people politically and culturally, and in helping them to play a constructive role in the building of society. The media is in a good position to steer the society clear of intolerance (religious or other forms), to help engender in it tolerance of others' views, to assist it to shun extremism and inculcate in it high-mindedness and enlightenment.

In order to develop society we need to know fully well the main players in the society which essentially are political leaders, intellectuals, teachers, technocrats, scientists, artists, labour and kisan leaders and social organizations called non-government organizations (NGOs). Political leaders are, of course, the foremost and most effective players in national development.

Politics is the vital instrument for changing the forms of government and society. The situation in which we find ourselves calls for the exercise of *ijteha*, because, with the advancement of knowledge, the nature of the needs also change, hence *ijtihad* and not *taqleed*. *Taqleed* is following blindly the old pattern of life. After every decade or so, improvements must be made in the infrastructure. Innovation and process of change are inbuilt in human beings. What is to be guarded against is that the change should be for the better and not for the worst. The physical world around the people too is constantly changing. To change the existing social, economic and political system, within which one is constrained to live and work, is the domain of politics. The responsibility for changing the system thus lies mainly on the political leaders, who should be conspicuous and superior from the common people in intelligence,

morals and performance. This gigantic task can only be performed by the political leaders if they put the collective interest of the society above their self-interests, if they are tolerant and devoid of all kinds of prejudices and love for wealth and comforts and if are incensed with the desire to serve others. The present brand of politicians, with a few laudable exceptions, have in their arsenal a planned way, through deceit, intrigue and pressure tactics, for securing vantage positions to exploit the masses for their selfish ends, and are thus incapable of serving the society.

The politicians and the various political parties should, in future, adopt the principle of "collective leadership" in their organizations. They should bring in democracy in their own ranks and strictly elect their office-bearers at all tiers and not nominate them, and treat their members as equal partners in political progression. The political leaders should, according to the modern requirements and the aspirations of the people, nurture new and capable leadership and allow them to play their rightful role, instead of keeping themselves entrenched as life-time heads of parties. The political parties should provide well-motivated leadership to guide the energies of the people in the right direction and make them effective players in the construction of the nation. The number of political parties should also be reduced from the present 37 to five or six at the most.

In the context of the above analysis of the requirements of democratic politics, it is imperative that General Parvez Musharraf, who had grabbed power unlawfully and, therefore, is a usurper, should now withdraw voluntarily and in good grace. The people of Pakistan cannot afford to have him as president, even without uniform for any further period, because of his awful past performance. He has long overstayed in office to the detriment of the country and its people. If Benazir Bhutto strikes a deal with General Musharraf in order to secure for herself the post of Prime Minister under him, it will be a betrayal of the democratic forces of the country. The people now want a real civilian president and a sincere and effective Prime Minister who will run the State, on their behalf in accordance with their will and with their effective participation, and who will be fully answerable to them.

The intellectuals are the backbone and foundation of an intelligent and progressive society. But the irony is that, in our present-day society, they do not base their formulations on evident truths; they are fond of presenting half-truths clothed in attractive attire before the people. The intellectuals should, first of all, be equipped with the right mindset themselves before they can guide others to the right way of thinking. They do not work hard to get rid of clichés, customs and norms of the dead past, and the wrong phrases from the West such as 'religion', 'national interest', 'secularism', 'the left and the right', 'minorities' etc. The intellectuals need, first of all, to understand that the concepts developed in the West, after the ruinous religious wars had ravaged Europe, and mostly during reformation and renaissance, have been derived from the enlightened values of humanity formed in the past, and that they had developed on the basis of the divine guidance given through the prophets. But, as it often happens, deterioration sets in if a mechanism does not exist to guard against incursions from the vested interests. The phrases mentioned above are the result of such negligence.

The intellectuals are the backbone and foundation of an intelligent and progressive society. But the irony is that, in our present-day society, they do not base their formulations on evident truths; they are fond of presenting half-truths clothed in attractive attire before the people. The intellectuals should, first of all, be equipped with the right mindset themselves before they can guide others to the right way of thinking. They do not work hard to get rid of clichés, customs and norms of the dead past, and the wrong phraseologies from the West such as 'religion', 'national interest', 'secularism', 'the left and the right', 'minorities' etc. The intellectuals need, first of all, to understand that the concepts developed in the West, after the ruinous religious wars had ravaged Europe, and mostly during reformation and renaissance, have been derived from the enlightened values of humanity formed in the past, and that they had developed on the basis of the divine guidance given through the prophets. But, as it often happens, deterioration sets in if a mechanism does not exist to guard against incursions from the vested interests. The phrases mentioned above are the result of such negligence.

The industrial workers and *kissan* leaders too are an important segment of society. They help the working class attain their economic rights and get their standard of living raised. The trade unions, along with other social service organizations are contributing positively to alleviation of poverty, easing of unemployment and promotion of welfare of society.

The Divine guidance imparted to human beings through the prophets, which pertain to living decently in the world, contains the fundamental teaching of "having a firm belief in the existence of God and serving humanity". In the Divine scheme, the individual is considered as the primary unit of society, and in order to order his/her life, all attention is given to educate the individual about certain moral lessons which make one a good human being and thus capable of contributing to the society's betterment. Some of these moral lessons are: do not indulge in prejudices emanating from different colours, languages, races, religions and sects and false notions and customs; treat one another as equal in all respects; stand up with the oppressed against the oppressor; do not amass wealth but give what is in excess to the needy; always speak the truth, do not lie and do not give false evidence; be helpful to others; do not force your views upon others but listen attentively to others' points of view. Thus the primary objective of Islam is to produce good human beings. In all countries and the whole world, the universal principles that have been adopted have been given by the Creator of the universe and the intellectually proactive human beings. Therefore, every person should be told that Islam primarily entails a moral discipline for the individuals, who form the basic units of the society. In addition to these moral lessons, Islam has given some outlines for good governance. They comprise the following: (1) Consultation is the cardinal principle in all state, government and private affairs. (2) Basic human rights are guaranteed. (3) Basic necessities of life are assured. (4) Dispensation of knowledge is given top priority (5) Equal status is granted to everyone living in the country irrespective of their religious or other affiliations (6) Wealth is distributed equitably over all sections of society. (7) The gap between the highest and lowest incomes is to be kept at the minimum. (8) Justice is to be provided to everyone, fast and inexpensive, without any consideration of status. (9) Rule of law is to be strictly enforced

and no body is allowed to take law into one's own hands. (10) The rulers are not masters of the people but their servants and are answerable to them for all their actions. (11) Ruler ship is a trust and it is not hereditary. (12) Rule of law should prevail and the rulers as well as the ruled are equal before law. (13) Establishment of economic justice in the society is government's responsibility. (14) Taking or giving bribe or acquisition of wealth through illegal or coercive means is totally prohibited. (15) Smuggling, hoarding and profiteering is strictly prohibited. (16) Giving false evidence is a cognizable offence. (17) Giving of *zakat* is obligatory. (18) Islam does not give any particular form of government whether parliamentary, presidential or any other form. It will have to be determined by the people in the light of their requirements and circumstances.

The cardinal principals of justice and rule of law, human equality, basic human rights, religious tolerance, that have been adopted by the West, are a legacy of the prophets, while moral deterioration, exploitation and wars of aggression are results of deviation from the above stated principles. The need of the modern times is to present, in understandable terms and in an articulate manner, the common ideology of all the prophets, which is Islam. Therefore, every person should be told that Islam primarily enjoins a moral discipline for the individuals, who are the basic units of the society, and transforms them into good human beings who are helpful to others in all circumstances. Islam is thus a way of life (i.e. *deen*) prescribed by the Creator. It is also to be noted that along with the advancement of the human specie different rules of life were given by the prophets, and now after the discontinuance of prophet hood these rule will have to be laid down by the people of the different periods themselves in the light of the Islamic principles.

The bane of the modern states is that they have highlighted and promoted the man-tailored 'religions' (which are different sets of rites, customs and hearsay under the tutelage of self-appointed interpreters of scriptures) in order to counter the concept of '*deen*' which is designed to promote good and resist supremacy of evil in human society; in other words, to solve the problems of the populace and protect them from the machinations and excesses of the vested interests. In reality, 'faith' and 'religion' are two divergent concepts and are not compatible. The most we could do is to practise religious

tolerance and not force our point of view upon others. We should let people change their views for the better on their own, through deliberation and dialogue. The clear direction given by Islam in the Qur'an to adherents of other religions is: "you (are free to) tread your ways and we will go on treading our way."

The vested interests of modern societies of the West, in order to create a space for themselves to rule as they please, have coined the term "secularism", in order to keep the clergy away from interfering in state affairs, in order to enable themselves to enjoy their worldly pursuits and monopolies unhindered. The term secularism has been misused in our country by some of our politicians and intellectuals to mean that the rulers are not bound by Divine moral rules in their handling of state affairs, and that they can spread all kinds of moral laxities in the name of 'enlightened moderation'. True, the self-imposed interpreters of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, the Pakistani clergy, in the garb of "Ulema", have no right to impose their concept of law and government upon the State. Any government that has been duly elected by free and fair elections has the right to make laws through the parliament to manage the affairs of the society to the best of its ability, of course in the light of the moral and other relevant parameters set by the Holy Books. Any learned persons, be they from the religious class or others, are free to send their views directly to government, or agitate them in the media. But they cannot force upon the government their personal views in the name of Islam and Shariah. The fact is that the knowledge of the religious elite about Islam is flawed, and is based on sectarian thinking developed during the period of the Muslim monarchy. They do not follow strictly the moral principles and the rules of governance laid down in the Qur'an. The courses of religious madrassas do not include the teaching of the whole of Qur'an. The terms '*deeni jamaaten*' and '*deeni madaris*' are misnomers and, therefore, the political parties and madrasas masquerading as such should instead be termed as 'religious or sectarian parties' and 'sectarian madrasas'

Taking part in politics calls for primarily addressing the mundane problems of the masses and working for their solution. Hence the religious groups should work as political parties to grapple with the problems faced by the people, and those political parties

which are working for solving the worldly problems of the people should not be considered as "*ghair deeni*".

The terms "the left" and "the right" are also a legacy of the West, coined during the struggle between capitalism and socialism. According to Qura'anic terminology the word "right" means the straight path or the right approach. I have often advised socialist friends a number of times to use the term "progressive democrats" for themselves in their day-to-day parlance. This would remove unnecessary friction between them and the progressive Muslims, and they would be able to work together smoothly to develop the nation. The experiments done in the past in the name of Islam and Communism need to be presented in the modern times in a fresh manner, and in their true perspective, in order to accommodate the requirement of modern polity. The forces of Islam and Communism are, in essence, anti-capitalist and can serve as allies in their fight against capitalism for the establishment of human equality, fraternity and dignity, and peace and prosperity in the world. What is needed is mutual accommodation, wider perception, open-mindedness, toleration of other's views and changing willingly one's views through dialogue and on the basis of arguments and sound articulation of views.

The term "minorities" inherently contains the notion of an inferior community as against the majority. According to Islam, all persons and communities dwelling in a country are equal in status and possess equal rights and opportunities for progress in all fields. In Pakistan, therefore, they should be treated as equal citizens of Pakistan, and all discriminatory laws detrimental to them should be abolished.

Another term that is misleading, and has become a tool in the hands of dictators, and which goes against the interests of the people, is "national interest". The so-called national interests of a nation may militate against the national interests of other nations, and become a constant cause of friction in their mutual relations. Instead, the common interests of humanity should form the basis of relations between nations. Our foreign policies should, as far as possible, give due consideration to the interests of other nations as well. This will create goodwill among nations and, in effect, contribute to the formation of a world community of nations.

I end this article with the hope that persons from among the intellectuals, the teachers, the students and learned people from different sections of society, desiring a change in the status quo for the better, will come forward to construct a right mindset conducive to moderation and enlightenment, and play their part in advancing the nation to an exalted and respectable position among the comity of nations

E-mail: safdarsiddiqi@yahoo.com

31 July 2007