

PAKISTAN-INDIA RELATIONS - THE WAY AHEAD

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Before dwelling upon the sub-topic of my dissertation "The Way Ahead", I would first touch the issue of the existing Pakistan-India relations. These relations, frankly speaking, are not good; they are pretty bad and will worsen if the people on both sides of the divide do not join their heads and bring out a happy and life-long solution to the problems facing them.

I will begin by saying that the Pakistan-India relations are spotted with many hurdles, big and small.

The first and foremost hurdle is the unholy alliance of the vested interests in both countries, constituting the ruling class, the religious elite and the immensely rich. Their narrow interests require that the mass of the people, especially the working class on whose physical efforts the economy of a country rests, remain illiterate, lack political awareness, is bereft of basic human rights of health, education, proper housing and a certain level of income that could secure for them not only sustenance in food, education, health care and housing but also leisure.

The second big hurdle is the absence of democratic, forthright and honest leadership from amongst the lower and middle classes. This shortcoming in this class (that constitutes the majority) is because they have not been trained in practicing long-term politics that engenders in one political consciousness and the ability to lead. On the contrary, they have been involved in short-term politics that

generate false expectations in the people by selfish, egoistic, power-hungry money-grabbing politicians. Another reason for lack of trained leadership among the lower and middle classes is the refusal of the ruling elite to devolve political and economic powers up to the grassroots level. Such an exercise of devolution would have given effective decision-making powers to the municipal committees and these, in turn, would have enabled the people to throw up their leadership from the lower tiers of society.

The third hurdle is the general psyche of the people on both sides which has been constructed by their political leaders over the last sixty years that India and Pakistan are enemy countries and cannot come to terms and develop friendly and brotherly relations.

The fourth hurdle is lack of right information about one another's developmental efforts in the educational, social and economic fields. The books, magazines and newspapers of both countries present a tainted picture about one another's activities. The print and electronic media is not portraying positive values and constructive statements of well-meaning leaders of public opinion. On the other hand, they are flashing news that causes fear and frustration in the ordinary people on both sides. They have turned into an anti-people mafia. The books in the two countries, pertaining to history and social sciences, misinterpret historical facts and put forth negative stances regarding human relationship.

The fifth hurdle is the non-existence of opportunities for the two peoples of India and Pakistan to freely mingle and exchange views with one another in an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding. The visa restrictions and high postal rates do not allow such relationship to develop.

The sixth hurdle is the unwillingness in both the peoples to learn from one another, and lack of tolerance of one another's views. Of course there are intellectuals of high standing on both sides but, generally speaking, they are not broad-minded and open to conviction; their historical perspective is blurred and is not based on facts; they only cater to the narrow needs of their countrymen rather

than humanity at large; they have a tendency to divide people rather than to unite them; they serve the needs of their shallow-minded politicians, rather than pick up courage to criticize them and their governments, and give a positive direction to their thinking and doings; they portray human rights not as a serious subject, as a mission with a useful purpose and a definite direction, and as a real opportunity to build their societies and benefit their individuals.; they project life only as an unfettered opportunity to live gaily and carelessly, to their personal benefits, not heeding to others' needs and aspirations.

You may go on adding to these hurdles that come in the way of peaceful and contented living, and healthy transformation of the societies of the two people of India and Pakistan. But I will stop her in order to proceed to the second part of my subject which deals with securing the future of our two countries. It is now high time that our intellectuals play a constructive role creatively, forcefully and fruitfully to soften severity of judgment and encourage forgiveness of past mistakes. Innovation in thought and action could thus chart the right path for people to tread on. They should bring forth and develop positive thoughts through their articles, columns and editorials while keeping in view the real needs of the people

The Way Ahead

The way ahead of us, the two peoples, is quite clear and apparent. Having analyzed and understood the negative aspects of Indo-Pakistan relations, let us now move forward, sure-footedly, to take the steps that are required to ensure positive results.

The first step should be to determine our stance about the true concept of "One Lord, One People, and one Faith" which is the humanist approach to all worldly matters. Granted, we cannot straightaway understand the full impact of this concept. Surely, we will have to tread a long way to imbibe this ideal. But let us start from what we can understand easily viz., the concept of "One Subcontinent, One People" The only basis on which this concept can be developed is by creating love and understanding on the individual

level, and articulating democracy and development on the collective level.

The second step that needs to be taken is that we, the two peoples, devote our energies and resources towards building an effective pressure on our respective governments to open up the avenues for exchange of ideas and goods by:

- Removing visa restrictions between the two countries;
- Minimizing postal rates and travel expenses;
- Giving MNF status by both states to one another for increasing mutual trade;
- Fully democratizing the electoral process, and devolving power to the lower levels with the purpose of throwing up true leadership from the lower and middle classes, and evolving truly democratic governance by representatives of the people;
- Running the business of the state on non-communal lines in order to benefit equally all its citizens irrespective of caste, creed and gender;
- Discouraging religious intolerance and religious elitism, and encouraging our peoples to exchange views and construct useful ideas freely for the betterment of the two societies;
- Giving priority to education and, for that purpose, exchanging delegations of students, teachers, intellectuals and journalists. Revising the curricula and syllabi for schools and colleges bringing them in line with modern requirements, and replacing inessential books with those which impart better education. Constructing fresh concepts of child educational development, and paying especial attention to primary and adult education.
- Exchanging books and magazines extensively.

The third step should be to make the electoral system of the two countries free, fair and transparent in order to enable people of the lower and middle classes to send their representatives to parliament for looking after their interests well enough. Elections should truly reflect majority opinion and become a means of change in the system and not of defending the status quo.

The fourth step should be to open up to the maximum extent trade relations between India and Pakistan. By importing goods at much cheaper rates we will be releasing pressure on economies of both countries.

The fifth step should be to substantially reduce expenditure on arms and ammunition so that maximum resources could be spent in the social sector in the interest of the masses. We should also exert to ban nuclear arms globally for the simple reason that these are weapons of mass destruction, and the costs incurred on this "nuclear game" are prohibitive. A "no-war treaty" should be signed between India and Pakistan in order to allay any fears of attack by either country. These fears are raised falsely in the public mind by the vested interests.

The sixth step should be to initiate a peace movement jointly, in alliance with Japan, China and SAARC countries, which could later on be developed into a World Peace Movement.

Last, but not the least, we should concentrate on developing a culture based on creativity, tolerance, dialogue, understanding and mutual cooperation, and on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Such a forward step will bring out the best in man, and help in making all-out efforts to establish humane and fruitful societies the world over. Such efforts will lead to the flowering of a civilization that humanity could be proud of.

Culture and civilization are the two most valuable end-products of human endeavour. The greatness and progressiveness of a nation is judged by advancements achieved in these fields. The main factors contributing to greatness and progression, as proved by history, are openness, creativity, variety and tolerance. Civilization thrives, and greatness grows, with the clash of ideas and the convergence of diverse influences, knowledge, viewpoints and cultures. For all these to develop and flourish, an environment of peace, friendliness and understanding is necessary. But for the creation of such an environment, dialogue and not confrontation is the basic tool. So let

us stand up and get ourselves counted as the torchbearers of such revolutionary and creative endeavour.

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A valuable response to this presentation was received on 25 August 1998 by e-mail from General Dipanker Banerjee (Retd) from New Delhi, as under:

“My dear Siddiqi Sahib,

I am sorry that it was not possible for us to meet again after the seminar at the Indian International Centre. You were very busy and engaged. But it was a delight and a pleasure to meet you in India. It was also high honour. A person of your integrity and devotion to your country, religion and to humankind, wherever you go will cast a spell of friendship all around you. These qualities are particularly valuable in today's tense times, and they are equally difficult to find, on both sides of our border.

We can hope and pray that times will change. But, to make these changes will require a lot of hard work and sacrifice from all of us. Once again my very sincere good wishes to you and to all our friends in Pakistan,

Yours sincerely,
Dipankar Banerjee”

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