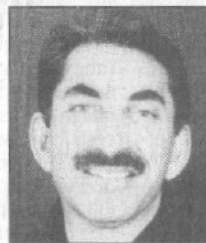


The feudal psy

OP-ED



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If we believe that one of the leaders of a religious party will lead us to formulate a futuristic educational policy, then we know that it is the evidence of our belief in the magical, supernatural qualities of a human being, a kind of personality worship, a sign of a feudal mindset

essary and dominant characteristic of which is to be afraid and fearful of the unforeseen and the unpredictable. As a result both of them have a mindset of trying to appease their respective unpredictable gods. The feudal system thus gives rise to a psychological

benefit of having a halo of piety attached to it, as the feudals and the clergy have had a similar material background and therefore a base for mutual links, both in Europe and the subcontinent.

Land ownership or being a landless daily wage earner, moulds and gives rise to a particular psychological makeup; as indeed being a factory owner or a factory worker would, which illustrates the fact that one's psyche is determined by one's material and social existence. This, of course, has been observed by many authorities before.

There are mainly two types of classes in feudalism — landowners and land tillers. This very fact has its repercussions in the psychological makeup of both groups. A cursory look at the formation of the psyche of land owners and land tillers would reveal that they may have a different psychological makeup, but a deeper look would reveal that they may in fact have some psychological similarities. The landowner may be threatened, or lorded over, by the vagaries of weather and nature and the conditions of the land, such as rainfall, sunshine or soil chemistry that may bring wealth in terms of bumper crops; or a drought or flood or land chemistry that may ruin him. Because of such unpredictable conditions, in most cases, it is impossible for him to plan for the future. He is therefore, almost completely dependent upon Mother Nature for his existence.

The land tiller, on the other hand, is completely dependent on the landowner for his and his family's survival. With no other means of a livelihood, the tiller has to till the land that belongs to others. The landowner is therefore the lord and master of the tiller, who is like a slave. The landowner requires the kindness of the unforeseen forces of nature, whereas the land tiller requires the good will of the landowner — both of them therefore develop a psyche, a nec-

FEUDALISM IS A TERM USED TO DESCRIBE A mode of production where land is the main source and means of livelihood. One person, or a very small group of people, owns the land that a large majority of labour is dependent upon for its survival. The landowner exercises full authority on employment and thus has full control over the livelihood of such people. Feudalism emerged in Europe around the 5th century AD; solidified itself in the 8th century and continued up to the 13th century; after which it slowly began to disintegrate as other means of production gradually developed. The system appeared in the subcontinent in the 7th century, continued up to the 18th century and began to disintegrate here as well for the same reasons.

Prior to 1947, the Congress Party was committed to land reforms in India. The Muslim League was not. Soon after independence and partition, the ruling Congress Party in India took over all large land holdings and estates, which were then redistributed. So in independent India, feudalism in its classical sense was replaced. In Pakistan it still survives as the chief source of livelihood, such that over 70 percent of the population is directly influenced by the feudal system.

European feudalism consisted of (a) the owner of a large piece of land who carried different titles and (b) the church, which had large tracts of land attached to it, with labour working on it. Thus the land owning minority and the clergy exercised an immense amount of influence over the lives and destinies of the landless peasants, tillers and common folk. In the subcontinent, the Moguls and the British created large land holdings, and in some cases Hindu temples and Muslim Mazars and Khanqahs were attached to them. Individuals and families owned large chunks of land, forming a major land owning class in the subcontinent. The feudal class has the

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tendency to be afraid of the unforeseen and the unpredictable and a consequent desire to appease this unforeseen, unpredictable force.

Since the landowner and the land tiller both are dependent upon such unforeseen, unpredictable forces, superstition is a necessary ingredient in both their psyches. One would therefore find that one of the peculiarities of the psyche of people living under feudalism is to be more superstitious than those in the industrialised systems. And that indeed is the case as is evident in findings brought forth by recent cross-cultural research. For instance, it was shown in one research that people differ across cultures in terms of power distance; power distance being the people's acceptance of the power others have over them. Those living in less industrialised regions were found have more of this trait as compared to the Europeans or the North Americans for example.

In another research it was found that people differ in terms of the importance they attach, and the respect they give, to the family backgrounds and social connections of others. Again, those in less industrialised regions were found to have more of this trait, called ascription, than some Europeans. We may speculate in the light of these findings that these characteristics of power distance and ascription are the manifestations of living in a feudal system. Superstition being a dominant trait of our Pakistani national character manifests itself in a number of ways in our daily lives. A few examples that testify to this fact: not starting something new or important on a Tuesday, carrying good luck charms in the form of "taaveez" and a host of other behaviours and practices. These behaviours however are sometimes disguised as religious rituals in order to bestow upon them certain sanctity. Only very few people, in this country, however are free of such superstitious

beliefs and practices, even after having stepped into the twenty first century. Such superstitions are, it is suggested, a reflection of living in the feudal system.

Another typical attitude closely linked to superstition may be called personality worship. Personality worship is a tendency of a person who regards someone else as having supernatural powers. Because of this perception, the admired person is held higher than others — perfect, or almost perfect, as compared to other earthly mortal beings. This attitude and perception is, of course, a direct reflection of the relationship between the landowner and the tiller.

Let us take a look at the leaders or some prominent figures of our national scene and notice our collective response to them. Regardless of whether these personages belong to the realm of politics, sports, arts, literature or the clergy, we regard them as having supernatural powers and abilities beyond human limitations; free of human foibles, and errors, capable of solving almost all of our problems.

If, for example, we consider a sportsman or a CEO of an MNC to be capable of giving us solutions to our national problem of illiteracy, or if we think that one of our TV, theatre or screen heroes will solve our national economic problems. Or if we believe that one of the leaders of a religious party will lead us to formulate a futuristic educational policy, then we know that it is the evidence of our belief in the magical, supernatural qualities of a human being, a kind of personality worship, a sign of a feudal mindset.

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Indictment by Red Cross

THE US has reportedly ^{Human rights Down 9/12/04} rejected a confidential report submitted by the International Committee of the Red Cross which charged that prisoner abuse was the norm at the Camp X-Ray prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Leaked to a section of influential New York press, the report speaks of psychological and physical coercion of prisoners which it says is "tantamount to torture" and thus unacceptable. The US had reluctantly allowed the Red Cross team to visit Guantanamo Bay in January 2002 after the media alleged widespread human rights abuses at the prison there. The chilling accounts given by some of those released from the dreaded camp seem to confirm the general impression rights groups have had of the off-shore American prison. The Pentagon itself had stated at one point that the Guantanamo Bay facility was chosen to keep those rounded up in Afghanistan because defendants' rights under US law did not apply to prisoners held on the island. Then, coining the term "unlawful combatants", the Bush administration brazenly denied them the rights of prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions. It took the relatives of those detained at Guantanamo Bay months and many legal battles in American courts for the US to relent and finally allow the Red Cross access to the prison.

In a country notorious for prison abuse and torture of prisoners, it is hard to believe that those held at Guantanamo Bay are now being dealt with more humanely by their captors. The Red Cross report also mentions the inclusion of doctors and medical personnel among those assigned the task of interrogating the prisoners. This, it says, is in "flagrant violation of medical ethics." The hasty and "sharp rejection" of the report in question by Washington once again points to the dangers and recklessness inherent in the policy of unilateralism being pursued by the Bush administration in its global war on terror. It is such behaviour on the part of Washington that makes the world, especially Arabs and Muslims, weary of its double standards and suspicious of its real agenda behind the war on terror.