



India and Pakistan – a distant view

BY NADIA BUTT

"Are you an Indian?" "No, I am a Pakistani." "Oh, means the same..." This was a pithy exchange of information at bus stop in Germany between an old lady and myself. I imagined that the old lady thought so because the Indian and Pakistani women look alike. But it was only my humble illusion.

Let me give yet another example. The other day, a middle-aged man asked me a typical question that is put to every Asian in Europe: "Where do you come from?" "I come from Pakistan." "Where is Pakistan?" "It is next to India." "Oh I see, the lost part of India." Allow me, dear reader, to cite my last shock for you.

One day, a young man, while trying to enlighten me about the status of Pakistan as compared to India, remarked in a nonchalant way that it was wise perhaps on the part of Muslim leaders to make a distinction between secularism and Islamism by creating a separate homeland for the Muslims hence allotting all fundamentalists a comfortable corner in the subcontinent where they could practise their self-defined Islam without being tainted with Hinduism. It was hard to reconcile with the latter part of his views.

Initially I was indeed powerless to hear these conflicting statements, coming from apparently reasonable enlightened Europeans I have just quoted, not because I have any prejudice against India but because I was

with German subtitles. One of the frontpage articles recently published in a prominent German daily newspaper describes the "Indian Myth" thus:

"India whose secrets have occupied the western imagination for more than two millenniums has opened its gates and has been brought to light. From everywhere it looks at you. Movies like Monsoon Wedding or Kick it like Beckham fill the cinema halls. The clubs of the bigger cities invite to Indian Dance Party or to Bombay Boogie Night (...) India is in vogue. For months, the International Economy Press swears to the 'Indian boom'."

The American Investment Bank Goldman Sachs prophesied recently that India will belong, until the middle of the century, to the three richest industrial societies of the world. The president of EU commission recently honoured the land as a 'new giant in world politics'.

"It seems as if the Indian dream comes true: at long last, to take the place that belongs to the biggest democracy of the world."

Fascination with Indian fashion and religion is considered to be paralleled with the term Orientalism. Similarly Indian spices are also a symbol of Indian exoticism just as classical dance and yoga. Schools of Yoga and Kathac dance can easily be found in the streets of Germany, England and France.

Let's acknowledge the grim reality that after what we show on our

compelled to question the very foundation of the creation of Pakistan or for that matter the status of my homeland—my motherland—once I had crossed the borders.

I suddenly felt that I had to revise all my history lessons about the time old conflict between India and Pakistan as well as the Kashmir issue to put my vision of the subcontinent in the right perspective. I felt betrayed. Nevertheless, I had finally realised that the moment of reflection had come.

However what perturbed me the most was: when will my countrymen's moment of truth come? When will we end our enmities with India? When will we open borders like European countries and stop producing more and more atomic bombs? For those if it is an impossibility, perhaps can look at the recent history of Europe. Can we not learn from it? Or do we still need two big wars and to throw atomic bomb to understand a simple phenomenon that not war but peace brings prosperity and happiness.

Here I wish to use the opportunity to stress the significance of the liberals. Neither the MMA nor the military in Pakistan can solve the tension between India and Pakistan but the liberal democrats who are sincere to a cause.

The other equally important issue is how far we are successful in projecting the right image of Pakistan on the international scene as against India, while considering her a rival and an enemy. Before blaming others for criticising us as being conservative and backward, intolerant and aggressive, let's peep in ourselves to examine what is wrong there.

I must reiterate that if I am pleading a case for Pakistan, I am not prejudiced against India. I admire Indians for producing great writers, actors and musicians. But I cannot help being a Pakistani and as a Pakistani I am bound to give a wake up call to my countrymen if I feel that we are merely considered a forgotten arm of India when we are a nation state too. In fact, I wish to stress the idea that if we have established ourselves as a distinct nation, we must strive to shed the image of Islamic extremists.

This should be the top agenda of any government to win respect in the comity of nations if not admiration. Once again I must say that living in the centre of Europe has provided me a chance to see how it is to be a Pakistani as against an Indian. It was quite disturbing to find out among the occidentals that their love for Indian culture, that is synonymous with exoticism, totally subverts Pakistan.

We Pakistanis fall in the category of fundamentalists whereas the Indians in spite of proving more fundamentalists than us especially after the Gujarat tragedy are still the true representatives of the mysterious East.

Not only buses in Germany can be seen with Indian advertisements but also students from all over the world buying tickets for Indian concerts. Indian movies are blockbusters in the big cinemas in Frankfurt, shown

channels to the outside world, no one is impressed to hear when I say, I am a Pakistani but quite enchanted to know an Indian next to me. People in Europe and in America are not aware of 'the real Pakistan' and its rich culture but take Pakistan for a land of bearded men with huge skull-caps who are busy oppressing women and giving asylum to Al-Qadia terrorists.

Since 9/11 and American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, foreign electronic and print media has been airing too much demonstrations of fanatics and radicals in the streets of Lahore, Peshawar and Karachi. Another misfortune is that Puritanism in our society has weakened our TV channels to such an extent that our women and fashion remain hidden from the eyes of the international viewers. The end result is that we Pakistanis are regarded as culturally barren and then bracketed with Afghans, Iranians and Arab extremists, though in reality the true Pakistanis never aimed at establishing a state after the fashion of Saudi Arabia or Iran.

For me being a Pakistani in the western world is not easy because I have to justify all the time if we, Pakistanis, are not Indians, it does not mean that we can be thrown into dustbin with Islamic extremists. We are people with a glorious cultural heritage. Therefore I have to invite the attention of my people to rethink our political strategy or perhaps redefine ideology of Pakistan.

We must not forget that Jinnah wanted a liberal Muslim state and not an Islamic state. Reacting, for instance, to a question by an enthusiastic youth about Gandhi's non-cooperation call, he once said: "Well, young man I will have nothing to do with this pseudo-religious approach to politics. I part company with the Congress and Gandhi. I do not believe in working up mob hysteria. Politics is a gentleman's game."

After the creation of Pakistan, the Founder of the Nation said, "You are free; you are free to go to your places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the State. You will find that in the course of time, Hindu would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, but in the political sense as citizens of the State."

Unfortunately, Jinnah's secular approach to politics was immediately banished from Pakistani political arena by the Mullah, but it remained the foremost trait of Indian politics. Consequently, the world views us as a victim of dirty politics, militarism and Mullahism whereas India as the biggest democracy. Hopefully the SAARC summit succeeds this time to win co-operation between the two countries by promoting good will.

After all, we cannot carry on with the legacy of colonization that was "divide and rule". Rather we have to end distances and divisions to offer a more secure future to posterity in the already dangerous world of atomic bombs.

Pak. Foreign Relat. - Gao

7/1/04

The Nation