

Generational attitudes

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I BEGAN this series of articles on demographic convulsions in Pakistan's history last week with some suggestions on how the very rapid growth in the country's population over the last half century may have influenced economic, political and social developments.

To think of a country's history in terms of generations is more than a simple journalistic conceit. Sociologists as well as historians agree that this is a legitimate enterprise. But there are different ways of defining a generation. Chinese, for instance, define generations in their recent history in terms of leadership groups. It makes sense for them to do so since that country's history owes so much to the deeds of men who ruled. Thus the first generation of leaders was dominated by Mao Zedong, the second by Deng Xiaoping, and the third by Jiang Zemin. The fourth generation of leaders took office a couple of years ago with Hu Jintao, the president, at the helm.

The Americans, on the other hand, like to think of their social and political history as defined by the attitudes, thinking and worldview of broad segments of their population.

India at that time was not in their best interest. Some others simply watched these movements from the sidelines.

The exchange of population that accompanied the partition of British India concentrated the supporters of the Pakistan movement in Pakistan. A palpable sense of Pakistani nationalism was an integral part of the outlook of these people. It is not surprising that the generation that was involved with the creation of Pakistan remained so preoccupied with India when it governed the country.

For this generation there were many symbols. Of these one of the most vivid ones was Liaquat Ali Khan's fist, waved at New Delhi from a balcony in Karachi. By showing his fist, Pakistan's first prime minister was demonstrating his resolve not to allow India to create a vast desert

elected prime minister, governed Pakistan. Both Ayub Khan and Bhutto were the members of the first Pakistani generation. The period during which they governed (1958 to 1977) was initially a time of confidence.

In the first part of this period the GDP grew at a rate of more than six per cent a year, the country was viewed as a model that other nations could follow, and Pakistan seemed to be in the early phase of an economic transformation of the type that was to dramatically change the fortunes of several miracle economies of East Asia. It had all the attributes of a country that, according to the analysis of W.W. Rostow, was on the verge of economic take-off.

But this mood of confidence changed suddenly when the deeply held animosity

towards India, ingrained in the psyche of the first generation, intervened and disrupted the process of economic progress. In the summer of 1965, prompted by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and frustrated by India's unyielding attitude towards the resolution of the Kashmir problem, Ayub Khan decided to force New Delhi's hand.

He attempted to stir up Kashmiris on the Indian side of the border by sending thousands of Pakistani troops into the Indian held

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worldview of broad segments of their population. Thus, the great generation that won a decisive victory for what came to be called the "free world" in the war against tyranny in Europe left a deep mark. This was also done by the "baby boomers" who followed the generation whose thinking was shaped by the Second World War.

Overlapping with the baby boomers was the Vietnam generation that came to be known not only for its opposition to the war in Southeast Asia but also for the self-indulgence that marked social behaviour in the sixties. American politics as well as its society and culture are now dominated by the generation that reacted vehemently to the excesses of the 1960s.

For Pakistan, it makes sense to divide the country's history by using the demographers' definition. According to this, a generation is generally seen to encompass a period of 25 years. With this kind of accounting, Pakistan's population is now into its fourth generation. For determining generational attitudes, the concept of median age — the age at which the number of people above and below is exactly the same — is more appropriate.

If we define the first Pakistani generation to be those that had reached the median age of 22 years at the time of Pakistan's birth, then the first Pakistani generation includes those born between 1925 and 1950. The second generation would include the people born between 1950 and 1975; the third, born between 1975 and 2000 and the fourth, born between 2000 and 2025. If the defining period of a person's life is the first couple of decades, then what distinguishes the first three generations and what can we expect from the generation that is now in its formative years? I will answer this question in two articles; one this week and the other to be published next week.

For the first Pakistani generation, attitudes were defined by the Indian independence movement and the intense rivalry between Hindus and Muslims, British India's two largest communities — not just communities but nations, according to Muhammad Ali Jinnah's "two-nation" theory. The thinking of this generation was influenced by the leaders who belonged to the pre-Pakistani generations. After all, Jinnah was born some 30 years before the year of birth of the people I have defined as the first Pakistani generation.

A large segment of this generation of Muslims of British India supported Jinnah's efforts to carve out for them a separate homeland. Some, however, opposed the movement for the creation of Pakistan in the belief that dividing the 150 million Muslims that lived in British

in West Pakistan by diverting the waters of the eastern rivers in the Indus River system. That was in early 1951 when the government of Jawaharlal Nehru had threatened to do exactly that.

The generation that was involved in the creation of Pakistan, or watched its establishment, is quickly passing from the scene. Less than 10 million of those who were living in 1947 are still alive; the median age of the remnants of this generation is 65 years. With its passage will also be lost the emotions, the dreams, the hopes and the fears that the Pakistan movement and its success created at that time.

That was the crux of the point made by Benazir Bhutto during her first tenure as prime minister (1988-90) when she entertained Rajiv Gandhi, her Indian counterpart, in Islamabad. She said in a press conference that since both Gandhi and she were born after the trauma of British India's partition, they could take a fresh look at the relations between their two countries.

That history does not neatly follow the dictates of demography is vividly illustrated when the baton was passed back in October 1999 from the leaders that represented the second Pakistani generation to a member of the first generation. General Pervez Musharraf was born in India, and migrated to Pakistan along with his family. He was then only four years old. His family joined eight million Muslims who came to Pakistan uprooted by communal violence in India or simply attracted by Jinnah's promise of a country that would accommodate the wishes and aspirations of the Muslims of what was once British India.

For this generation of British India's Muslims, partition was a defining moment. Their views were shaped not only by Jinnah's dreams but also by the horrors that accompanied British India's partition. General Musharraf, no doubt, still carries with him some memories of those events.

General Musharraf's earlier approach to India — considerably less accommodating than that shown by former prime ministers Bhutto and Sharif — may or may not reflect those early memories. But childhood experiences and memories do form attitudes and determine behaviour in later life. I will return to this point in the article next week. For the moment, I will go back to the experiences that defined the thinking of the second Pakistani generation, the people born between 1950 and 1975.

The formative years of this generation, were spent while President Ayub Khan, the country's first military leader, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the country's first

troops in the Indian-held Kashmir. These troops were disguised as mujahideen, the first time this word entered political discourse in Pakistan. When India responded by launching an all-out war against Pakistan, Ayub Khan lost the image of the towering strength he and his associates had cultivated assiduously since 1958, when he staged his coup d'etat.

Ayub Khan's sudden vulnerability drew in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, once his foreign minister, and Mujibur Rahman, a charismatic leader of East Pakistan, into an opposition movement that challenged the military leader's right to govern under a political system that he had himself designed. Ayub Khan lasted for three and a half years after the September 1965 war with India, but those were turbulent times that influenced the thinking of the generation that was reaching maturity at that time.

Both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto were members of that generation. While Mohammad Ali Jinnah was the leading figure of the first generation, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto occupied that space for those born in the 1950s. Politically, Bhutto was a contradictory figure; on the one hand he seemed to care for the poor and the underprivileged, on the other, he showed an enormous amount of cynicism in order to preserve himself in power. Having authored a new Constitution for Pakistan and after successfully piloting the draft through an assembly that was highly suspicious of his intentions, he busied himself in dismantling brick-by-brick the structure he had built himself. Strong personalities leave lasting impressions.

Bhutto's personality and his political modus vivendi left a lasting imprint on the generation that followed him. His disregard for all institutions and a laser-like focus on personal political survival set a pattern that was to be followed by the generation that wielded power in the 1990s.

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However, as indicated above, the passage of power from the first to the second Pakistani generation — a process that began in 1988 — was interrupted in October 1999. Will it be resumed or will Pakistan simply skip from the first to the third generation of leaders? This question will be addressed next week.