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Pakistan: a dialogue between history and politics

Ayesha Jalal

One of the greatest historians of our times, Fernand Braudel, who loved France with the same complicated and consuming passion as I love Pakistan, was 'determined to talk of France as if it were another country, another fatherland, another nation'. In seeking to attain a measure of scholarly objectivity I never had difficulty writing about Pakistan as my country, my motherland and my nation. I had the advantage, no doubt, of writing on Pakistan in veritable intellectual exile, mindful of traversing that familiar trail pioneered by Thucydides many centuries ago. Distance can work wonders in strengthening bonds and clarifying perspectives, especially when interspersed with the inimitable warmth of Lahore winters. Yet the search for an acceptable level of objectivity could not have succeeded without a conscious and deliberate inversion of the relationship between history and politics that has been a distinguishing feature of post-independence Pakistan. Politics far too often has moulded history, not drawn upon its lessons. The state structure too frequently has cast its imprimatur on politics, not reflected its compulsions. A scholar of Pakistan had to try liberating the country's past from its present, and restoring to history its creative power. Not the power which appeals to a past, more contrived than real, to distract from the present, but one that reassesses, rejects as well as recasts. Only by developing a critical tradition can Pakistani history expect to inform the present and shape the future.

It is not my intention, at a time when Pakistan is reeling under manifold problems, to invite you to indulge in the luxury of a historical discourse. But history has the quality of becoming a mirror for the present and proffering choices in scenarios where all options appear to be closed. And in situations where critical thinking has been banished for extended periods, history is an indispensable allegorical device. Freed from distortion and prejudice, history enables individuals and collectivities to change their minds and rethink their futures.

A dialogue between Pakistani history and politics will have to consider how far or near we are from where we set out to be. Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah had a bold vision of the destiny of Muslims in the subcontinent, a vision that reflected the needs and aspirations of his disparate constituents. Throughout his long political career he had been concerned with the arrangements under which power was to be shared at the all-India level once the British quit India. If he was to have any say in the negotiations to determine India's constitutional future, Jinnah had to secure recognition as the representative voice of all Indian Muslims. But the interests of Muslims in provinces where they were in a minority were different from the interests of Muslims in provinces where they were in a majority. During the twentieth century, minority province Muslims secured their interests by deploying the argument of Muslim majorities in the north-west and the north-east of India. Punjabi and Bengali Muslims received fewer seats on the provincial legislative councils as part of the bargain conceding weighted representation to Muslims in the minority provinces. Reciprocal safeguards for provincial minorities were as deeply ingrained in Indian political life as separate electorates for Muslims. First granted in 1909,

separate electorates were incorporated in successive constitutional reforms in the early twentieth century aimed at diverting Indian political attention towards safe local and provincial pastures while keeping the unitary centre firmly in British hands.

The structural contradiction between the emphasis on local and provincial arenas of politics on the one hand and communally compartmentalised electorates on the other was to have large implications for Muslim politics. A political system with a very limited franchise in which the lure of state patronage and the spoils of office were localised at best encouraged provincial particularisms, not the all-India perspective that was the logical concomitant of Muslims being a separate political category, however dispersed geographically and diverse linguistically. The more so since separate electorates mitigated the need for political parties with provincial and all-India based organisations. Success in the political system created by the colonial state depended upon rival Muslim politicians manipulating local factions as they jockeyed for position within the protected walls of specifically Muslim constituencies. While the Congress under Gandhi was beginning, albeit imperfectly, to impose its stamp on the old factional structures of local politics, in the Muslim constituencies politicians were able to work successive constitutional reforms heedless of the All-India Muslim League set up in 1906.

The constitutional dialogue of the early nineteen-thirties was dominated, ironically enough, by the Punjab Unionists, a supra-communal alliance of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh agriculturist interests. Not surprisingly, the Unionist construct of 'Muslim interest' which found expression in the Government of India Act of 1935 was unacceptable to Muslims in the minority provinces. Provincial autonomy under the 1935 Act was a pleasing prospect for Muslim-majority provinces, thus the demand to separate Sind from Bombay and elevate the North West Frontier Province to the status of a governor's province. But involving the elimination of the 'official bloc' - a safeguard for minority rights - provincial autonomy accentuated the insecurities of minority Muslims. The revival of the All-India Muslim League in 1934 with Jinnah in the saddle was largely at the behest of politicians in the minority provinces disgruntled with the constitutional arrangements that were on the anvil.

Times were changing. Pointing to Muslim majorities was proving to be a wasting asset. So minority province politicians turned to basing their demands on the fact of Muslim provinces rather than populations alone. The British under the 1935 Act were likely sooner or later to concede substantial power in New Delhi on the basis of electoral success in the provinces and localities. Minority province Muslims could plausibly deploy the weight of the majority provinces and wrest advantages at the centre which were denied to them in their provincial arenas. This is why Jinnah and the League had now to stress that Muslims, whatever their persuasions, should accept the whip of a single all-India party.

The claim was resoundingly rejected in the 1937 elections. Muslim voters in the majority provinces opted for provincial, and often supra-communal, groupings rather than for all-India parties. Yet the provincialisation of Muslim politics had not removed them as an important political category in discussions about the future of India. For one thing, the Congress too had failed to make a dent on the Muslim provinces. If the Congress high command was now preparing to make a final bid for power at British India's unitary centre, it would somehow have to melt the residues of provincialism in the Muslim provinces. Congress pressure on the Muslim provinces might force them to give the League at the centre a chance to mediate on their behalf

and, in due course, to discipline them. This, together with the fears of Muslims in the minority provinces, gave the Quaid the building blocks for a strategy intended to win an equitable share of power for Muslims at the level of all-India political arrangements.

Any strategy for divided and disorganised Muslims had to make a break with the past. The federal provisions of the 1935 act offered no safeguards for Muslim interests, whether at the centre for the Muslim provinces or in provinces where they were hopelessly outnumbered. Separate representation was an even more uncertain safeguard since Muslims still would be outvoted in the making of a new constitution. What Muslims needed above all was to overcome the limitations of minority status.

The outbreak of war in Europe provided an opportunity for fresh departures in Muslim politics. In March 1940, without delineating the precise geographical boundaries, the All-India Muslim League formally demanded separate Muslim homelands in the north-west and the north-east of India, repudiating once and for all the minority status enshrined in separate representation and declaring instead that Indian Muslims whatever their differences were a nation. This was Jinnah and the League's attempt to assume the mantle for all Indian Muslims, in majority and minority provinces alike.

There is the resonance of contradiction in a claim to represent all Indian Muslims and a purely separatist demand for independent Muslim states. Yet upon closer scrutiny, the Lahore resolution is consistent, implicitly if not explicitly, with recurring themes in twentieth century Muslim politics. The resolution made no mention of a centre, weak or strong; a curious omission considering that the Quaid-i-Azam was interested primarily in the apportioning of power at the centre. Moreover, the resolution made no mention of 'Pakistan', and none whatsoever of partition. It made a big play for Muslim-majority province sentiments by appearing to concede even greater autonomy than granted under the 1935 act. But it was by no means abandoning Muslims in the minority provinces. According to the resolution, the frontiers of the 'Independent States' would conform to the existing boundaries of the Muslim provinces. While leaving Muslims in the minority provinces outside the Muslim 'autonomous and sovereign' areas, this would ensure that they included large non-Muslim minorities. Proof that the League was not slamming the door shut on a future constitutional arrangement covering the whole of India is the reference to 'the constitution' to determine reciprocal safeguards for minorities. It was only by placing his strategy within an all-India context that the Quaid-i-Azam could conceivably expect to safeguard the conflicting interests of all Indian Muslims.

After 1940, the Quaid-i-Azam advanced the constitutional lawyer's argument that at the moment of the British withdrawal the unitary centre created by the colonial power would stand dissolved. Any reconstitution of the central state apparatus would have to be based on negotiations between two essentially sovereign states, Pakistan (representing the Muslim-majority provinces) and Hindustan (representing the Hindu-majority provinces). What the Quaid had in mind were two states, Pakistan and Hindustan, which would either enter into confederal arrangements at the all-India level or make treaty arrangements on matters of common concern. Despite the Quaid's skilful use of the 'two nation' theory and, more specifically, the political category of 'Muslims' to paint a veneer of solidarity and unanimity on constituents who were neither solid nor unanimous, recourse to Islam was not enough to pull the Muslim-majority provinces behind a strategy designed to safeguard the interests of all Indian Muslims. Loud

claims notwithstanding, the League failed to bring the fragmented and localised structures of politics in the Muslim-majority provinces firmly under its organisational umbrella. The lack of any effective control over Muslim-majority province politicians critically narrowed the Quaid's options in the final negotiations with the British and the Congress. Fissiparous tendencies and factional rivalries in the Muslim camp, and the possibilities these presented to a Congress high command bent upon cutting the League's demands down to size, are keys to understanding why a strategy intended to safeguard the interests of all Indian Muslims went awry. The cabinet mission plan of 1946 based on a three-tier federal constitutional arrangement came close to giving Jinnah what he wanted and was accepted by the League in lieu of a sovereign Pakistan. But in the end, instead of a confederal arrangement based on the grouping of provinces, the Quaid was forced to acquiesce in Mountbatten's plan for a partition involving an agonizing amputation of the Punjab and Bengal.

Partition as it came about did not entail the division of India into two 'successor' states, Pakistan and Hindustan. It was the Congress which inherited British India's unitary centre. Pakistan consisted of the Muslim-majority provinces shorn of eastern Punjab and western Bengal (including Calcutta) - the 'mutilated and moth-eaten' state which the Quaid had categorically rejected in 1944 and then again in 1946. A Pakistan without its large non-Muslim minorities in the Punjab and Bengal was hardly well placed to negotiate reciprocal safeguards for Muslim minorities in the rest of India. Congress's insistence that partition was a final settlement and that the Muslim areas were merely 'contracting out' of the 'Union of India' foreclosed any possibility of the Indian Muslim 'nation' using the grant of independent statehood to its collective advantage. Cast in the role of the 'seceding' state, and with Muslim provincial particularisms providing a major driving force for its creation, Pakistan had somehow urgently to confirm its independent existence by creating a viable central authority over territories which had for so long been governed from New Delhi.

The common misconception that religious solidarities alone formed the basis of Pakistan has detracted attention from the monumental difficulties it faced in creating an entirely new central government apparatus. Initially, the Quaid's powers as governor-general were the only guarantee of any meaningful exercise of central authority in Pakistan. The Muslim League's organisational machinery was weakest precisely in the areas which became part of Pakistan. Hamza Alavi's well-orchestrated notion of the 'overdeveloped' state in post-colonial South Asia ignores the absence of any central coordinating agency in Pakistan consequent on partition. The dominance of the civil bureaucracy and the army in Pakistan is simply attributed to the successful extension of the colonial state's administrative tentacles into society and economy. With theoretical determinism triumphing over history, it is small wonder that Alavi's proposition tells us so little about the reasons for the contrasting political developments in post-independence Pakistan and India. More to the point, it obscures the crucial factors that have led to the almost chronic infirmities of political processes in this country.

The concept of the centre or, more precisely, the very different inheritances of India and Pakistan in this regard, can help in teasing out the roots of their divergent political developments. In my forthcoming book, *The State of Martial Rule: the origins of Pakistan's political Economy of Defence*, I have examined the first decade after independence and analysed how the Pakistani state structure was given shape. A focus on the first decade of Pakistan's existence is especially

illuminating for a number of reasons. It clarifies the open-ended relationship between the state and competing socio-economic groups in the process of formation and, being a period of flux in the balance of power between elected and non-elected institutions as well as between a newly constructed centre and linguistic provinces, explains why Pakistan experienced an administrative as opposed to a political centralisation.

An interplay of domestic, regional and international factors weakened the position of parties and politicians within the evolving structure of the Pakistani state by tipping the institutional balance in favour of the civil bureaucracy and the military. The focus on the institutions of the state places the question of 'ethnicity' and provincialism in an altogether different light. In strategically located countries like Pakistan social tensions which take the form of provincial particularisms are not merely a consequence of the intrinsic difficulties in welding together linguistically and culturally diverse constituent units. The problem is at the same time more basic and more complex; basic because provincial demands are in effect demands for job opportunities, social services and an ever larger cut of the state's financial resources; and more complex because these resources are almost always hopelessly meagre, especially when the state's strategic perceptions have resulted in a political economy characterised by defence expenditures well beyond its resource capacities. In either case, the state tends to place even more emphasis on the centralisation of authority in the pursuit of development policies aimed at maximising revenue rather than social welfare - a process which in Pakistan saw the non-elected institutions assuming dominance over the elected institutions. These non-elected institutions carried a legacy of uneven recruitment patterns from the colonial era, exacerbating the problem of integrating diverse linguistic and socio-economic groups.

The sheer intensity of linguistic group alienation in contemporary Pakistan necessitates an analysis of the compulsions and choices at the time of constructing and consolidating the state. Comprehending these might facilitate a dispassionate reconsideration, so urgently needed, of the imperative as well as the potential for reconstituting the existing state structure. There was nothing preordained about the collapse of political processes in Pakistan. Investigations into the immediate aftermath of partition underline the brittleness of both elected and non-elected institutions; the Pakistani civil bureaucracy and military, far from being 'overdeveloped', were desperately short of skilled manpower and the requisite institutional infrastructure. The initiation of hostilities with India soon after independence entailed the diversion of very scarce financial resources - inevitably extracted from the constituent units - into the defence procurement drive at a time when the political process had yet to be clearly defined. The need to raise revenues for the centre saw administrative reorganisation and expansion taking precedence over building a party based political system reflecting Pakistan's linguistic and cultural diversities.

The shifting balance of power from the political to the administrative arms of the state was to have dire implications for relations between the centre and the provinces as well as between the Punjab and the non-Punjabi provinces. Administrative interventions and the diversion of scarce provincial resources into the defence effort tended to pit politicians at the provincial and local levels against civil bureaucrats appointed by the central government. The more so since Punjabis from the middle and upper economic strata were the main beneficiaries of the recruitment policies of the colonial state and, therefore, dominated the military and the central superior services. Yet despite similarities in their socio-economic and educational

backgrounds, there was no love lost between state bureaucrats and the variegated landlord politicians of the Punjab. It was only when class and occupational interests converged, which was not too often, that Punjab's landlord politicians could expect their associates in the state apparatus to serve their provincial or even class interests. The notion of an 'organic alliance' between a predominantly Punjabi civil bureaucracy and military and Punjabi landed families confuses the politics of compromise with the politics of 'organic' collaboration.

Pakistan's first military intervention in 1958 was preceded by a phase of military-bureaucratic dominance that can be dated to 1951. Grossly underestimating the need for a national party with popular bases of support, civil and military officials in the fifties set about weakening the political process and strengthening their international connections in the hope of moulding the administrative machinery and pursuing development strategies aimed at creating a political economy of defence. But the very fact of a military takeover suggests that in spite of the dominance of the civil bureaucracy and the army, the internal structures of the state were still fluid enough to be threatened by political forces. So there is every reason to avoid the oft-repeated conclusion that the failure of the 'parliamentary system' in Pakistan flowed from the 'power vacuum' created by a fractious and corrupt provincial leadership at the helm of political parties with no real bases of popular support. A clear distinction between phases of dominance and actual intervention by the military suggests why weaknesses of political parties offer such an inadequate explanation for the army high command's decision in 1958 to directly wield state authority. History is replete with instances of fragmented and semi-organised, even spontaneous, opposition movements effectively challenging the state's claims to legitimacy and exploiting latent tensions both within and between the central and provincial arms of the civil service. A more convincing explanation for Pakistan's first coup d'etat will have to consider the highly plausible, if paradoxical, situation where the dominance of the non-elected over the elected institutions had actually ended up undermining the exercise of state authority.

Curbing the political process was not tantamount to crushing it, much less preventing its complex dynamics from shaping the state structure. And so it had to be thwarted and eventually aborted by the military and the civil bureaucracy operating within the constraints of constructing and consolidating a state in a difficult regional and international setting. Tensions with India combined with international pressures to influence domestic politics and economy, distorting relations between the centre and the provinces in particular and the dialectic between state construction and political processes in general. The carefully nurtured nexus between the top echelons of the military and the civil bureaucracy in Pakistan and the centres of the international system in London and Washington was of tremendous significance in this context. Far from stepping into a 'power vacuum', senior civil and military officials manipulated their international connections in a concerted effort to depoliticise Pakistani society before it slipped into the era of mass mobilisation. It was a momentous decision. The institutional shift from elected to non-elected institutions in the first decade, which the military intervention of 1958 sought to confirm, has so far endured all manner of experiments: controlled politics, 'populism', outright authoritarianism and, most disconcertingly, even the present much vaunted party based system of parliamentary democracy.

History's dialogue with politics will be incomplete without outlining the main lessons of these experiments. Between 1958 and 1971, two different military rulers tried consolidating state

authority and implementing externally stimulated development strategies. Both relied on the support of a predominantly Punjabi army and civil bureaucracy and, through the extension of differential patronage, on social and economic groups with political bases that were neither extensive nor independent of the state apparatus so as to pose a serious threat to the regimes. But while general Ayub Khan's regime came crashing down in the very congested city streets that its strategy of selective mobilisation was supposed to have washed clean, that of general Yahya Khan ended ignominiously with the disintegration of the country. The collapse of the two regimes is a resounding comment on the limitations of state consolidation under military and bureaucratic auspices, not to mention the resilience of political opposition, whether organised or semi-organised, in societies subjected to systematic depoliticisation.

The paradox is all the greater because when Ayub began building his new order, the civil bureaucracy and the army seemed to be his regime's best bet for survival. His basic democracies order of 1959 was an undisguised attempt at institutionalising bureaucratic control over the political process and, more specifically, at disenfranchising the more volatile sections of urban society - especially industrial labour and the intelligentsia. In opting to consolidate the state's hold over society by extending the scope of bureaucratic patronage – both political and economic - to the rural localities, Ayub hoped to bolster central authority without being constrained by parties and politicians with provincial bases of support. Providing differential economic patronage to a 'new' leadership in the rural areas and the regime's supporters among business and state officials in the urban areas was essential for the success of the basic democracies system. Once the logic of functional inequality had been accepted, it was natural for the regime to adopt economic policies emphasising growth rather than redistribution.

The debate on growth versus redistribution has obscured the full extent of the state's role in the formation of classes. Rather more emphasis is placed on investigating the location of dominant interests within the state structure. Yet given the frequent dissonance if not divergence between the institutional interests of the military and the civil bureaucracy and those of particular socio-economic groups, it seems more worthwhile to investigate the location of functionaries of the state within key economic sectors. State sponsored links with socio-economic structures generally prove to be less tenuous than the 'organic' links between dominant social groups and the state although these too might weaken over time. Direct martial rule in Pakistan always has been accompanied, albeit in varying measure, by grafting military officers in top positions within the civilian administration as well as in semi-government and autonomous organisations, the first step to locating those with proven loyalties to the military institution in the upper strata of the economy. While influencing the course of socio-economic development these policies fall short of confirming the legitimacy of a military-bureaucratic state or securing for it the necessary social basis of support. So the state resorts to its second major role in the domain of political engineering in an attempt to attract, or more aptly coopt, certain dominant socio-economic groups within its orbit of differential patronage and selective mobilisation. The initiatives of the military-bureaucratic state in Pakistan elucidate the quality of the state as a magnet in defining the field of political privilege.

Stressing the magnet-like quality of the state is not to underestimate the role of social groups in political and economic developments. In helping identify which social sectors are most likely to develop closer links with the administrative machinery it tells us quite as much about

the qualities of key groups in civil society as it does about the nature of the state. Yet despite the search for social support and legitimacy the state in Pakistan has tended to uphold the interests of the dominant non-elected institutions rather than those of key socio-economic groups to which at different stages it has been loosely tied. This in large part explains why social dissidence against state authority wielded by Punjabis in the main has taken the form of regional or specifically linguistic affiliations. Now if we consider the state's two main roles - in locating its functionaries in key economic sectors and in determining the field of political privilege - it is possible to see why the institutional dominance of a predominantly Punjabi civil bureaucracy and army has heightened the grievances of non-Punjabi provinces and of the various linguistic groups within them.

It is this factor of entrenched institutional dominance by a mainly Punjabi army and federal bureaucracy that has on repeated occasions frustrated attempts to restore democratic processes in Pakistan. Consider the role of Yahya Khan. While agreeing to hold the first ever national election on the basis of adult franchise, the general was averse to transferring power to any political configuration, from the eastern or the western half of the country, which aimed at circumscribing the interests or reducing the dominance of the military and the bureaucracy. In the late forties and early fifties when the state was still in the process of formation, the sharing of power between the two wings may have been a matter for the main political party or parties to settle. By 1970-71, the institutional stakes of the military and the bureaucracy within the existing state structure were much greater than those of the diverse social groups represented by Mujibur Rahman's Awami League and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP). This, rather than the supposedly irreconcilable differences between east and west Pakistani electorates and the intransigence of certain politicians, is a valuable point of reference in assessing why no political formula was found to prevent the tragic disintegration of the country.

The institutional imbalances within the state structure survived the triple trials of civil war, military defeat and 'populism'. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had a unique opportunity to reconstitute the state by tilting the balance against the non-elected institutions. A talented and enigmatic political leader, Bhutto confused reforms enabling him to keep better watch and ward on the military and the civil bureaucracy with reforms squarely aimed at altering existing institutional imbalances within the state structure. It was in many ways the classic dilemma of a 'populist' politician in power. Needing the state as a vehicle of redistributive reforms for the underprivileged, Bhutto chose to deploy state authority to cajole and coax sections of privileged social groups to join his political bandwagon. By diluting his party's populist platform, he failed to organise a political institutional counterweight which could effectively withstand the military-bureaucratic onslaught in alliance with industrial and commercial groups to eject him from the central arena and, consequently, deprive him and the PPP of the state's magnetic power to attract uncommitted adherents.

General Zia-ul-Huq's coup bore a broad resemblance to earlier military takeovers of the state apparatus. But while borrowing freely from his illustrious predecessors, Zia also broke significant new ground. If the political process was to be ruled and regulated by the rod of martial law, society at large was to be ordered by the rigours of religious rectitude. Repression of an especially ruthless sort neutralised the challenge of politicians, notably the activists of the PPP. Islamic posturing of a particularly blatant kind drew in the support of the main social groups that

had rallied to the Pakistan National Alliance's campaign against Bhutto's government. Yet the calculated enthusiasm of the religiously-minded among the trading and commercial groups did not add up to the larger sums in Pakistan's political arithmetic. Hence the monotonous repetition of the general's dictum: an order to hold elections one day stood cancelled the next day. It made sense to lean on the familiar pillars of the non-elected institutions than risk all in the quest for an elusive popular mandate. The local bodies elections of 1979 revealed the uncertainties inherent in any electoral process which Zia managed to circumvent once the Soviets invaded Afghanistan.

Using the spectre of an external threat to Pakistan's survival with telling effect, Zia treated the country, as citizens watched with bated breath, to a form of political and socio-economic manipulation unparalleled in intensity. Dubbing the process 'Islamisation', that vague but potent catchphrase, the general declared a moratorium on critical thinking, the exercise of free political choice and, most remarkably, on the very existence of class based tensions and demands. Such magisterial denials of economic inequalities and deprivations, matched by the ban on party politics, gave impetus to the linguistic and cultural fragmentation of Pakistani society with more and more of the disaffected couching their grievances against a Punjabi dominated state in terms of 'ethnic' exclusivity. An acute polarisation now enveloped all strata of Pakistani society - the dominant and the subordinate alike. The difficulties were compounded by the fact that the state's internal structures were not only affected by the broader social tensions but infected with a distinct deepening of rivalries between its two main institutions - the civil bureaucracy and the army. As ever, martial rule saw military officials being slotted into top positions within the civilian administration at both the provincial and central levels as well as in semi-government and autonomous organisations. To avoid bottlenecks in the rate of promotions, and the potential dangers that posed, senior military officers were tempted into retirement with ambassadorial posts. The military's occupation of strategic positions within the state apparatus, and all the legal and extra-legal privileges this afforded, saw the cream of the central superior services going sour quite as rapidly as the delicate mix of Pakistani society.

There was nothing new about the Pakistani state's attempts at socio-economic engineering. But there was a qualitative difference. Instead of civil bureaucrats and pro-government politicians, exceptions in both categories granted, the main beneficiaries of state patronage now were select groups of army officers. Moreover, instead of clamouring to acquire agricultural land, enterprising army officers were coveting the industrial and especially the service sector - trading, transportation, construction, urban real estate and, above all, defence contracting. If the Ayub era had seen civil and army personnel climbing the economic ladder with amazing ease, Zia's era went many steps further in utilising state authority to prevent the favourite sons of the military establishment from wilting monetarily.

Yet even the most effective methods of social engineering, and invoking the inviolable symbols of Islam to discriminate against women as well as minorities, could not quite solve the regime's problem of legitimacy. Zia had to find some sort of a popular mandate through a slow and selective mobilisation of at least some segments of key social groups. With the opposition's Movement for the Restoration of Democracy challenging the legitimacy of his nominated Majlis-i-Shoora, and Washington's growing embarrassments with the general's 'Islamic democracy', Zia in 1985 finally agreed to hold national and provincial assembly elections on a non-party basis. Much as he had expected, the interval between the setting up of the Shoora and elections had

significantly changed perceptions. By 1985 there were enough members of the Shoorā keen on retaining their privileged access to state authority and many for whom staying on the margins of a system based on differential patronage was nothing short of political and economic suicide. As the results showed, the attractions of state patronage and protection were irresistible in comparison with the opposition's strident calls from the wilderness to boycott the elections. State magnetism succeeded yet again in creating a new field of politicians, albeit drawn from the same socio-economic strata that had always dominated the political arenas of west Pakistan. His political system endorsed, and with an eye to the simmering discontents in rural Sind, Zia appointed a Sindhi landlord, Mohammad Khan Junejo as prime minister and, in December 1985, lifted martial law.

The costs of maintaining a dependent and subservient political system, however, proved to be exorbitant. Huge sums of money were distributed to assembly members along with imprudent loans to the regime's supporters. The burgeoning of a grants economy had grave implications for the fiscal health of the state. When Zia seized power, the centre's debt reservicing charges had been roughly equal to its revenue receipts. By 1985 interest payments were outstripping receipts. The trend predictably worsened once the regime donned a civilian mask. Yet none of this had any bearing on the institutional balance within the state. The prime minister and parliament could only be as powerful as Zia wanted them to be; the instant they tried flexing their muscles, they were sent packing.

All said and done, Zia's ability to perpetuate his rule for eleven long years had as much, if not more, to do with the shifts in the regional balance of power following the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After December 1979 the United States funneled billions of dollars worth of military and economic aid as reward for Zia's support of the Pakistan based Afghan resistance movement. Western military and financial aid spawned a parallel arms and drugs economy while the presence of some three million Afghan refugees on Pakistani soil lent fuel to the fires of social conflict ignited by the regime's policies of political denial and differential patronage. Phenomenal kickbacks for military and civilian defence contractors and the narcotics kings won the regime a hard core of supporters it was in no position to expose. Despite a preponderance of patriotic and professional officers and troops, the corruption of a few tarnished the reputation of the military as a whole. If the fifties had seen senior civil and army officers adopting a blueprint for a state structure geared to supporting a political economy of defence, the interplay of domestic, regional and international factors in the eighties saw the Zia regime bringing the scheme to virtual fruition.

Zia's death along with senior aides in an unexplained air crash has brought Pakistan to its present impasse. Contrary to the hopes of the millions who participated enthusiastically in the election campaign, and the calculations of those able to exercise their right to vote, the beginning of a new era in Pakistan seems more like a never ending past. Impatience with the lack of change is positive, but ultimately ineffective unless informed by the recent as well as the relatively more distant history of this country. A general's replacement by a popularly elected leader cannot at a stroke remove the daunting legacies of military rule or, for that matter, the persisting imbalances between elected and non-elected institutions. A state structure long dominated by non-elected institutions is not easily reconciled to granting ascendancy to elected institutions. The move away from the state of martial rule has given a new twist to, not resolved, the long-standing

contradiction between the state structure and political processes. The next step in the resolution of this contradiction, if it is to be in favour of a party based parliamentary system, will not only have to overcome obstacles inherent in the existing state structure but also some rigid barriers in perceptions that have become part and parcel of our social mentalities.

Whether we are going to take a fatal stumble at the threshold of opportunity presented by the general elections of November 1988, or confidently stride across it, belongs in large part to the domain of contingency. This is just a typical convoluted scholarly way of saying that despite the structural constraints, the matter really is in our hands. The proposition that knowledge is, or at any rate can be, power is not merely a scholar's dream. A clear and correct appreciation of the strategies devised by our forbears, especially the Quaid-i-Azam, to work out the mechanisms of sharing power as well as the machinations resorted to by unrepresentative and unaccountable rulers and institutions to monopolise power might facilitate the task of confronting the awesome challenges of the present.

For a people who forged a state on the basis of such an original claim to nationhood, nothing could be more galling or tragic than the erosion of a national vision. The contradiction between the state structure and political processes during prolonged periods of partial mobilisation under martial rule has atrophied our mental worlds quite as much as it has localised our politics. Disdain for politics and politicians coupled with cynicism towards public causes has plunged us into the lowest depths of individual careerism, commodity fetishism and, worst of all, unbridled corruption and nepotism. These attitudes were grist for the mill of depoliticisation. Zia's systematic campaign to discredit parties has seen Pakistan lapsing into a style of politics characterised by hiraderi ties, massive infusions of illicit funds and a flagrant use of the state apparatus at all levels of society to up the ante for favoured candidates. The extinction of ideological considerations in local electoral politics is one of the more paradoxical legacies of a military ruler who propagated Islam so vociferously from the pulpit.

Consequently, even in this era of a return to democracy, national level politics are being held hostage to local issues based on a sudden, and somewhat spurious, commitment of landed oligarchs to the development needs of their constituents. Yet the choice of local arenas for the channelling of development funds cannot be equated with grassroots mobilisation in the developmental effort. Diverting political attention from the centre where real power is concentrated to such ennobling causes as road-building, sanitation and electrification in the localities is a well-worn colonial device. Devolution of power to local levels of government is laudable, but it has to be matched by building bridges for supra-local solidarities among the deprived and the dispossessed. The glaring inequalities, so deeply embedded in local structures, cannot be surmounted without a national programme on common socio-economic problems. A nationalisation of Pakistani politics alone can loosen the grip of local notables and serve the true developmental needs of the working multitudes.

We must not erroneously equate a nationalisation of politics with arbitrary centralisation under administrative direction. A primary lesson of Pakistani history tells us how and to what effect a military-bureaucratic state has relied upon a localisation of politics for its self-perpetuation. A genuinely national vision would reveal the need for at least three types of restructuring.

First, a point already alluded to, would be a renewed emphasis on the common socio-

economic problems facing the working peasantry, industrial labourers, unemployed youth and also the toiling intelligentsia cutting across specific localities, districts and provinces.

Second, we need to rethink the concept of a centre which had no existence at the time of our creation, and hence had to be imposed from above. It is an opportune moment for a reassessment. The spectacle of their chief minister taking up cudgels against the elected government of prime minister Benazir Bhutto at the centre appears to have softened diehard Punjabi opposition to demands for provincial autonomy in the smaller provinces. Moreover, it has made explicit what has always been implicit, namely that it is not Punjabis across the board but rather the two main institutions of the state to which some of them belong that have dominated non-Punjabis and denied them their fair share of political and economic rights. Let this opportunity be seized upon intelligently and not wasted in futile bickering over all and sundry. A centre can be renegotiated through the stimulus provided by a free union of constituent units. The assertiveness of certain linguistic minorities within existing provinces has complicated the federal dilemma which Pakistan faces today. Pakistani federalism for the future must undoubtedly concede a measure of provincial autonomy - legislative, administrative and financial - and safeguard the interests of provincial minorities. Yet the lessons of history should alert us to the even more pressing imperative of assuring, in a creative way, an equitable share of power at the centre for linguistic provinces and significant minorities within them. This has to be done not only by providing for adequate representation in elected institutions but by offering incentives for recruitment to the two main non-elected institutions of the state. A reformed and reorganised military and civil service can, and indeed will have to, play a constructive part in the reordering of relations between state and society.

This brings me to the third, and most important aspect, of the restructuring that is needed in Pakistan. The restoration of some balance and professionalism in the dominant non-elected institutions is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the reconstitution of the Pakistani state. Only a purposeful attempt at redressing the institutional balance in favour of a sovereign and supreme parliament can lead to the attainment of that goal. Organisationally vibrant, nationally based political parties can only flow from a decisive shift in the institutional balance which makes parliament the primary political arena for competing groups searching for popular support. And since constitutional provisions have a habit of being honoured more in the breach than in the observance, the need for an independent and impartial judiciary cannot be emphasised enough.

The lifting of the domestic clouds cannot of course be expected to happen without an improvement in the regional and international climate allowing for a move away from a political economy of defence to a political economy of development. Slackening of East-West tensions since the Gorbachev initiative, and particularly the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, have been hopeful signs on the international horizon. The regional environment might appear to be rather more vitiated by the threat emanating from a powerful neighbour exhibiting a hegemonic bent. But Pakistan would do well to undertake a reappraisal of the real sources of regional strength, an exercise not embarked upon by the currently embattled Indian establishment. Recent events in Sri Lanka and even Nepal suggest just how well political resolve can spoke the wheels of India's military machine. Our country would be a more effective regional power than it has been in the past if it nurtures a stronger and leaner defence which does not swallow up the lion's

share of scarce development resources. Extravagant spending does not necessarily buy better defence. A healthier, better educated and more productively employed people relying on sufficient defence are the best guarantee for Pakistan's security and integrity. While the evocation of foreign bogeys might be convenient ploys for discrediting governments, international and regional factors today, taken on their own, do not wholly militate against the assertion of the supremacy of political institutions in the process of reconstituting the Pakistani state.

Scholarly prescriptions in historical gloss might jar some practitioners and near observers of politics. The confirmed pessimists may argue that social conflict against a backdrop of an all-pervasive culture of weapons and drugs has altered Pakistan's prospects beyond redemption. Yet Kalashnikovs are merely the instruments which wreak havoc, not the wellsprings of the ills that have come to beset our state and society. History, by contrast, is not the pliable instrument which some in Pakistan have sought to reduce it to, but potentially a guiding light that can illuminate the path ahead of us. For a people who have historically striven to attain safeguards and an equitable share of power for vulnerable minorities, a creative approach towards a renegotiation of relations between the state structure and political processes, and also between state and society, should easily be within their realm of genius. Vital to this exercise in reordering is a new concept of a centre, drawing on the brilliant example set by the Quaid-i-Azam in the formulation of his political strategy. The odds against the Quaid were much greater than the odds facing us today. And he came within an ace of complete success despite the lukewarm support to his broader vision from the Muslim-majority provinces. We have the country that he created in which to implement some and potentially all his ideas, and will continue to have it if we are not cussedly determined in our own follies to lose it. The future of Pakistan will be secure once its history is freed from political exploitation and its political processes liberated from the stranglehold of an inequitable state structure.

I have spoken of the magnet-like quality of the state drawing in politicians and individuals within its orbit of patronage. The people of Pakistan must collectively decide to demagnetise the state and make civil society the locus of historical and political initiative. It is only when an empowered people and dynamic political processes shape the structure of the state will Pakistan as our country, our motherland and our nation be invested with a truly authentic quality of magnetism.