

INDIAN ELEMENT IN PAK'S IDENTITY

Karachi: I have been reading a volume entitled, *The Final Settlement*, prepared by a think-tank in Mumbai, called "Strategic Insight Group." It identifies the "pre-requisites" for a durable peace between Pakistan and India. I shall mention one of them here, for it is both intriguing and provocative.

The group maintains that contradictions in Pakistan's self-perception work as a major obstacle to peace. Some Pakistani spokesmen trace their national origin to the All India Muslim League's Lahore Resolution of 1940, making their state a protest against Indian dominance. Others trace it to Mohammad bin Qasim's conquest of Sindh in 712 AD, which makes Pakistan a "representation of foreign conquests." A final settlement between the two countries will require Pakistan to perceive itself not as "non-India" and "not in terms of protest or conquest but simply as a normal and progressive state."

The group goes on to say that Pakistan is currently witnessing a contest between the advocates of socio-economic modernisation and the proponents of religious orthodoxy. Peace will more likely be made if the balance of power shifts in favour of the progressive and modernising forces.

Some of our own commentators have sought to establish our "non-India" character by appealing to our nativity. Mr Aitzaz Ahsan argued a few years ago (*The Indus Saga*) that the areas now composing Pakistan are the inheritors of a civilisation that flourished in the Indus Valley several thousand years ago, and that it was distinct and separate from the civilisation that developed in India of which the Indus Valley had never been a part. More than an affirmation of the Muslims' separateness from the Hindus, the establishment of Pakistan in 1947 was a reaffirmation of the separateness of the Indus Valley from India.

In a recent article in *Dawn* (June 17), Sardar Aseff Ahmad Ali holds that our allegiance to Islam is only a part of our identity. Unwilling to say that we are in any sense "Indian," he observes that we are South Asians, and that we are the people of the Indus Valley. But, unlike Aitzaz Ahsan, he sees the Indus Valley as a

part of the subcontinent. Its civilisation is not to be regarded as unconnected with developments in the rest of South Asia. He argues that religion alone cannot explain our nationhood: Muslims in other lands — Turks, Iranians, Egyptians, Iraqis, etc. — have each their own distinct identities, and they are proud of their pre-Islamic history. Why, then, can't we take pride in the Indus civilisation? We must seek our identity in our own land.

Pakistan is not the same as India. True, but I should like to submit that the term "South Asia" has come into usage mostly since independence, and that the word "India" can be used in more than one sense. India is a state, but it is also the name of a landmass, a geographical region. Pakistan may then be seen as a part of the Indian subcontinent, just as it is a part of Asia. India is also the home of a complex and advanced civilisation of which we do partake to some degree.

Civilisations are not self-contained; they interact with one another. There is evidence that the Indus Valley did interact with the Iranian and Mesopotamian cultures. But what happened when Harappa and Mohenjodaro became extinct? According to the *Cambridge History of India*, some of the hymns in *Rig Veda* mention the Indus and all the five rivers of Punjab. A map showing territorial delineations around 500 BC places all of the Indus Valley in India. The rule of some of the ancient Hindu kings extended all the way into Afghanistan.

It would then be reasonable to conclude that as the Aryans consolidated their hold on the land, and as their men of learning articulated Hindu philosophy, codes, and mythologies, a two-way process of interaction materialised. The Indus culture found its way into India, and the Indus Valley itself was first Hinduised for some 2,000 years, and then Islamised for more than a thousand.

As we stand today, we are a mix of the aboriginal, Dravidian, Aryan, Semitic, and Mongol ethnicities; our beliefs and cultural expressions represent a mix of Animist, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Judaeo-Christian, and Islamic influences.

View from PAKISTAN

By ANWAR SYED

It is hard to see why any of us has to apologise for the presence of a Hindu element in our identity: after all, the ancestors of many of us were once Hindu, and in today's Pakistan many millions of Muslim individuals carry last names, denoting caste affiliations they share with Hindus

These elements are at peace with one another in the personalities of most of us, as if they had been homogenised. It is hard to see why any of us has to apologise for the presence of a Hindu element in our identity: after all, the ancestors of many of us were once Hindu, and in today's Pakistan many millions of Muslim individuals (Rajputs and Jats among others) carry last names, denoting caste affiliations they share with Hindus and Sikhs across the border.

The ordinary Pakistani links the matter of identity with his family, clan, tribe, village and, if his horizons extend that far, with his district and province. He is content with these identifications. The worrisome problem here is not that he is caught up in a crisis of identity, but that his identification with Pakistan remains nebulous. This applies to folks in the minority provinces more than it does to the Punjabis. The issue of identity becomes relevant in domestic politics basically with reference to the balance between the interest of the collectivity (the nation) and that of the regions and localities. The purists among us maintain that all elements in our identity other than the Islamic deserve to be expelled. But it so happens that the vast majority of Muslims in the world will not accept this advice. They want to keep Islam along with everything else that makes them what they are. Let me take a moment to

recall an interesting incident. About 20 years ago, a friend of mine set out to establish a Pakistan Society of Western Massachusetts. The project encountered opposition from some of our other friends who argued that since we were all Muslims the fact of our being Pakistani was of no consequence, and that any attempt to firm up our Pakistani identity would dilute our Muslim identity.

The same argument has been made within Pakistan. The Punjabi and Urdu-speaking elite who dominated our government and politics argued that since we were all Muslim it did not matter who ruled and got a larger slice of the "cake." All talk of provincial rights and under-representation of other ethnic groups in governance was said to be simply mischievous. The majority of the Pakistanis in western Massachusetts did not accept this reasoning and went ahead to establish the organisation referred to above, which is still thriving. Nor has the idea of Muslim nationalism done any better in Pakistan: it has not kept the country together; its failure dramatised by the secession of East Pakistan in 1971. In the same vein consider also the emergence of sub-nationalism and the persistence of separatist feelings in Sindh, Balochistan, and to some degree even NWFP.

Those of the ruling elite in Pakistan who did not look to Islam as an integrating agent (for instance, Ayub Khan and Z.A. Bhutto) were nevertheless unwilling publicly to set aside the idea of Muslim nationalism. They chose to be ambivalent. They relied upon a "strong" Central government to keep the country together. The present regime, headed by General Pervez Musharraf, is doing the same. But we know that reliance on a "strong centre" is just as unavailing as reliance on our common allegiance to religion for promoting national solidarity.

Reconnecting with our Indus legacy, which in effect means recognising the presence of a Hindu element in our identity, may facilitate the process of reconciliation with India. But it is not likely to be any more effective in bringing about national integration or unity than the other two agents mentioned earlier. A

Sindhi nationalist may argue that if Islam is all that matters, he does not need Pakistan to be a good Muslim. Nor does he need a political union with the Punjabis and others to be able to honour his Indus legacy.

India, Iran, Egypt and numerous other countries have been in place for hundreds, even thousands, of years. They have their share of ethnic divisions and internal conflict. But that fact does not diminish the sense of belonging to the country that the people in each case have. They continue to be Egyptians, Indians, and Iranians even as they differ or fight amongst themselves. That is not the case in our country. The Punjabi, Sindhi, Baloch, and Pakhtun identities have existed for hundreds of years. But Pakistan is only 58 years old, meaning that we still have to get used to the idea of being Pakistanis.

This will not happen until opinion-makers in the minority provinces begin to feel, and tell their audiences, that being Pakistani is something good and profitable. They will not develop this feeling until they have a satisfactory level of participation in this country's governance. They cannot have that kind of participation if authority and power vest mostly in the Central government. They can exercise power effectively only if it resides in the provincial governments. Hence their demand for provincial autonomy.

I am inclined to conclude that Pakistani nationhood will not mature, and national unity and solidarity will not materialise, until the bulk of decision-making power is transferred to the provinces. There is much talk of provincial autonomy a few months ago and Gen. Musharraf's government appeared ready to concede it. The government was said to be contemplating constitutional amendments that would enable it to transfer power and functions to the provinces. But that talk has abated, and folks like Nawab Akbar Bugti have become mysteriously quiet. I will say that if the plan for provincial autonomy has somehow been swept under the rug, those who have swept it are no friends of Pakistan.

By arrangement with Dawn