

INDIA -PAKISTAN SOCIO-CULTURAL RELATIONS DURING VAJPAYEE PERIOD

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Abstract

Peace and prosperity of the South Asia region is mostly dependant on the relationship of India and Pakistan. The Nuclear tests openly started nuclear politics in the South-Asian region, which force us to look at Indo-Pak relationship from a different perspective. Terrorism is another main factor, which has affected adversely the relations of both nations. India and Pakistan have common socio-cultural heritage. Film sector, Art, Sport, education, Sindhi Sufi tradition, drama visitors exchange programs are all socio-cultural paths for both side common man to come together. But all these paths are now disturbed. The cultural heritage of the subcontinent was held to ransom by the hostile relation between India and Pakistan. In that perspective the Socio-Cultural relations has tried to critically analyze in the paper.

Key Words: - Film sector, Art, Sport, education, Sindhi Sufi tradition, and drama visitors exchange programs

Introduction

India and Pakistan entered the 21st century with too many challenges for improving their relations. Globalization, free market policy and terrorism are some of the main factors on which both nations had to think and make policies which would support the development of their nations and create peaceful relations between them. The nature of the relationship of both nations definitely affects countries of the South Asia region. Peace and prosperity of the South Asia region is mostly dependant on the relationship of India and Pakistan.

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Pokharan I on May, 18, 1974 inaugurated a new phase in relationship with nuclear dimension. From here on Pakistan was in search of an Islamic bomb and on May, 28, 1998 it conducted its nuclear tests. These tests openly started nuclear politics in the South-Asian region, which force us to look at Indo-Pak relationship from a different perspective.

Terrorism is another main factor, which has affected adversely the relations of both nations. From the accession of Kashmir to India, Pakistan has always tried to disturb peace in this region through initially by war or infiltration or later by sponsor militant groups. Hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane, militant attack on Jammu and Kashmir legislature, attack on Indian Parliament, attack on Raghunath Temple, attack on Akasar Dham Temple, serial bomb blast all over India have created tensions and questions are raised on the relationship of these nations. For all these incidents, India always blamed Pakistan Government and ISI. Pakistan also alleges that whatever disturbances take place in India is its internal matter and that Pakistan has no role to play. In previous chapters socio-cultural and political relations up to 1998 have already been discussed. To appreciate the situation of this relationship it is required to continue the discussion after 1998.

SOCIO- CULTURAL RELATIONS FROM 1998

Nuclear tests of both India and Pakistan in May 1998 sparked fears not only of a new nuclear arms race in south Asia but also of the collapse of nuclear non-proliferation efforts at the global level. This nuclear acquisition created fear in the minds of the common people of both nations. People from both countries were visiting their friends and relatives on both sides after the Lahore declaration but after the Kargil episode it was difficult for them to do so. India and Pakistan have common socio-cultural heritage. However, this commonality could not boost their relationship. Pakistan Government most of time cut the most powerful cultural link that still existed between the two South Asian countries: Indian movies. The Pakistan Government did not allow Pakistani TV to show Indian movies. It is socio-cultural path for both nations for decreasing enmity in the minds of common people, because most of the time in front of their TV screens, Pakistanis and Indians had often been peacefully united.¹

¹ Maria Madalena L. Carvalho-Fischer and Matthias Fischer, "Pakistan under Siege, Pakistan after September 11th, 2001", 'Second evacuation: Nuclear War between Pakistan and India' Vanguard Books, Lahore, 2004.p.96

Another important way for creating socio-cultural relations is education and traditions. In undivided India Islam had included achievements in the fields of mathematics, science, medicine, and astronomy. It has been replaced by the current woeful state of affairs. For this, the role of extremists was also suspicious for putting sectarianism before Islam. Pakistan's illiteracy, poverty, backwardness, and hunger have been misused by extremists for establishing the concept of jihad.² Publicity of the talks in Agra between India and Pakistan in July 2001 promised much for exchanging and extending educational linkages, but unfortunately delivered little.

At the state level, sports are another important factor for coming closer of people of both nations. Cricket is inseparable from the contemporary culture of the Indian subcontinent. Cricket between India and Pakistan is an emotional game with immense potential for arousing unity or hatred with the same intensity. The popular response to the Indian cricket team's tour shows that there was no deep antagonism towards India on the part of the Pakistani public.³

Promotion of cultural understanding on either side of the border could be increased by increasing exchanges between Sindhi and Punjabi speaking communities in India and Pakistan, who have survived the trauma of partition. It was the Sindhi Sufi tradition that bound the two together. Both Muslims and Hindus alike revered Sufi Saint Poet Shah Abdul Latif. But the Pakistani establishments kept the communal equation unsettled in Sindh. Yet the bonds between the two communities have not been snapped altogether. Along with the Mumbai-Karachi ferry service, the Munabao Khokrapar (Rajasthan Sindh) rail link ought to have been revived as proposed by India in October 2003. Unlike Sindhis, Pakistani Punjabis for long remained indifferent to their language Punjabi. Madeeha Gauhar, Pakistan's renowned stage actress, director and political activist and the founder of the theatre group Ajoka, visited India in November 2003 with her new play 'Bullah', the play based on the life and teachings of Baba Bulleh Shah, the revered saint poet of Punjab.⁴ The Ninth World Punjabi Conference (January 29-february 1,2004) in Lahore with the participation of the then Chief Ministers of West and East (Indian) Punjab, Pervez Elahi and Amrinder Singh, respectively, had stressed the cultural commonality between Pakistani and Indian Punjab and had requested both the governments for relaxation of visa regimes to

² Alexander Evans' "India, Pakistan, and the Prospect of War" Current History April 2002 p.163

³ P.M.Kamath,(ed) "India-Pakistan Relations" courting peace from the corridors of war, Pub by, Promilla & co. publishers, in association with Bibliophile South Asia URL, New Delhi, 2005. p-67

⁴ Ibid, p-201-202

facilitate mutual visits across the borders for the promotion of Punjabi language, literature and common heritage and more importantly pleaded for free access for writers, poets and journalists to both Punjabs. A drama was enacted in the conference 'Aik thi nani'. It dealt with the lives of the two nation's film and drama producers. The conference could adapt well-known literary works from both the countries and folk literature and art could be popularized by holding cultural festivals and book fairs.⁵ There have been cultural and economic exchanges. Even for good quality marble, Pakistan had to depend on quarries in Rajasthan.⁶ A good will gesture from the Delhi chapter on the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), a private organization gifted a truckload of red sandstone needed for restoration work in Pakistan.⁷

So far as the visitors and exchanges programs are concerned, there are various instances. It has been observed that Indians going to Pakistan under academic/cultural visits are by and large from north India; particularly from Delhi and most of the Pakistanis visiting India remain confined to the precincts of Delhi-Agra-Jaipur totally oblivious of the India, south of the jamuna. There are rare cases of writers like Kamila Shamsie, who had a rare opportunity of spending a week as a writer in residence at Stella Maris College in Chennai. In one of the recent travel accounts, a Pakistani businessman who traveled to South India wrote that "After talking to Indians from all walks of life I come away with three powerful impressions. The foremost is how little Pakistan really figures in their overall thinking, particularly in the south. It is necessary to encourage culture understanding of the 'other's in an impressionistic as well as in a studied manner. But till recently, a researcher or a scholar from either country has had to face insurmountable difficulties in getting a long term research visa from both the countries as borne out by my own experience".⁸ There had been many events where the Pakistani participation had been registered like the ZeeT.V. Competition 'SA RE GA MA PA', BCCI organized IPL tournament, the Star T.V. shows 'Laughter Challenge etc. After the Mumbai attack in 26 November 2008, all these links were broken. Some of the Pakistani artists were forcibly made to leave India like the stand up comedian shakeel. 'Seeds of Peace' is a non-governmental international foundation launched by an American journalist John Wallach in 1993 for bringing together school children aged

⁵ ibid. p203-204

⁶ Indian Express on July 22, 2003

⁷ Indian Express, august 11,2003,

⁸ Daily Times, January 16, 2004

between 13-15 of war-torn regions in the Middle East, African countries and the Balkans. Since 2001, this program has been extended to the Indian subcontinent to bring together such children from India and Pakistan. Despite the sound intentions and sincerity of purpose, the programme has certain limitations. It has by and large remained an elitist programme as the students selected to participate are from the elite schools from Mumbai, though efforts are now made to involve other schools also. One of its limitations is that Indian and Pakistani school children meet in a third country that is in the US. This also puts a high premium on the knowledge of English that may automatically rule out students from not-so-elite schools even if they happen to be English medium schools. But in 2003, the children from the two countries who had already met in the US also met in Lahore.⁹

Conclusion

The Indian Express reported how the cultural heritage of the subcontinent was held to ransom by the hostile relation between India and Pakistan. State of Pakistan has unfortunately already turned towards Islamic extremism. Neither country would be required to “give up” Kashmir, merely to keep it on hold, as it were. Pakistani stubbornness on the Kashmir issue has been certainly agonizing the life of the common people of both nations. When Pakistani military intelligence has given active support to the Kashmir-based Muslim guerrilla movement, it is suppressing linkages between the common people of both countries. On the brighter side, there has been the growing number of Kashmiri Muslims who are wary of the conflict and wish to reach and accord with India. In turn, India wants to cut down its constant and heavy military-modernization plans.¹⁰ But, whenever Pak sponsored militant attacks in this region take place, the process for establishing peaceful life of civilian people is disturbed.

⁹ P.M.Kamath, “India-Pakistan Relations” courting peace from the corridors of war”, Op. cit p-201-202

¹⁰ Musa Khan Jalazai, “PEACE IN SOUTH ASIA” India-Pakistan relations, Nuclear 2005, Weapons and Cross Border Infiltration, Al-Abbas International, Lahore, Pakistan.2005 P-111